

**Reflection on the Gospel-11th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B
(Mark 4:26-34)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

The first of the parables in today's gospel reading has no parallel in the other gospels. It compares God's kin-dom to a trusting sower who scatters the seed by day, sleeps by night, and simply observes the "earth produce of itself" until it is time to harvest the grain. The sower's actions of scattering, sleeping, rising, and going in with his sickle are paralleled by his "not-knowing how" the seed is transformed into grain. We may, in our times, have a more sophisticated understanding of the process of growth. We have no less reason to stand in awe at the wonder of it all.

In an era of urbanization, supermarket chains, and online shopping even for groceries, we can easily lose sight of the source of food and the miracle of food production. This little parable serves as a reminder of the goodness of the earth and of the God who sustains our planetary home. It inspires us to contemplate the myriad ways in which the earth speaks to us of God and God's empire or kin-dom. At another level, we might question how the sower's actions and attitudes provide an image of God's reign. Is it in the sower's trusting that all will be well while "not-knowing"? Is it in the observation that the grain is ripe for the harvest? Is it in the prompt action to bring in the harvest? Parables are meant to tease their hearers/readers. They remain open-ended and challenging.

The second parable is probably familiar to most of us as it appears in all three synoptic gospels. Matthew and Luke both parallel the mustard seed parable with a parable about a woman mixing yeast into flour. Mark, in contrast, juxtaposes his mustard seed parable with that of the trusting sower. Mustard seeds were tiny, although they were not the smallest of seeds and have never been known to become the largest of shrubs. The idea that God's reign provides shelter for the birds to make their nests is a challenging one at a time when so many species are becoming extinct precisely because their habitats are being destroyed by human activity.

Some scholars have pointed out that the mustard seed was a weed. To compare God's reign with a weed may have raised a smile or two. It would certainly have exercised the minds of Jesus' audience. Maybe Jesus' disciples were in need of encouragement even in the early stages of the Galilean ministry. Maybe the curious and hostile were in need of a reminder to take this movement seriously, for extraordinary things can come from the most inauspicious beginnings. Opposition to Jesus had surfaced at the outset. Mark's community may also have been experiencing opposition and feeling the need for the wisdom that comes from a carefully crafted and perfectly timed story.