

Readings: *Ezekiel 17:22 – 24; P 91(92):1,2,11-14; 2 Corinthians 5: 6 – 10; Mark 4: 26 – 34.*

Today – after the long break of Lent and Eastertide – we return to the regular reading of the Gospel of Mark. We have missed (1) growing signs of the hostility of some of the scribes and Pharisees to Jesus, (2) his choice of twelve of his followers as apostles *to be with him and to be sent out to preach*, and (3) the failure of his friends to understand his mission.

We pick up the narrative towards the end of chapter 4 – one of only two in Mark's Gospel which is given entirely to the content of the teaching of Jesus (the other is chapter 13). Chapter 4 consists of several parables and some teaching about the purpose of parables. It seems probable that this teaching was not all given on a single occasion, but that Mark has assembled material from different parts of the tradition, and that some of this material is the work of the Church as it sought to apply the teaching of Jesus to its own situation.

Today's reading starts with a short parable which is recorded only in Mark's Gospel. It compares the kingdom (or perhaps we should translate the word as "the kingly rule") of God to the sowing of seed, a period of waiting and then the harvest. The most frequent interpretation of the parable is that it is an encouragement to the disciples to believe that – despite the hostility of others – the seed Jesus has sown will in the end produce a harvest. And it may be that the parable was included in the Gospel because Mark wanted to apply it to the contemporary followers of Jesus, for whom he wrote, and who were themselves facing hostility and persecution.

One scholar has suggested that the parable is speaking of the way God himself works – "He lets things run their course, passes them by and ignores them. But when his hour has come...then his wondrous act brings in the kingdom".

Whatever the precise comparison being made in the parable, it contains for us a message of hope and encouragement: Like the farmer in the parable, we *do not know how*, but there will be a harvest because God wills it.

The second parable in today's reading expands on this theme – pointing to a harvest which exceeds expectations, just as a great bush can grow from a single tiny seed.

There is no room for despair – the future is in God's hands.