



# GROUPS

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

**Series:** Mark Part One - Week Four Nov 12, 2023

**Scripture:** Mark 4:3-8, Mark 4:9, 11-13, Mark 4:33-34 (NIV11)

*Community is shaped by the conversations we share. These questions are just a tool to help you meaningfully engage with the themes of this week's teaching.*

**Message Summary:** This week we look at four parables in Mark 4 and again interpret them in their connectedness. The main point was that truth is being sown in our lives even now, and we need to explore how we hear it, where we make room for mystery of the divine in our lives and how open we are to give ourselves over to the way of things and see the kingdom in the things and life cycles around us.

- **Seed and Four Soils (Mk 4:3-8)** In this chapter, Mark follows the Jewish wisdom tradition that used the parables more to confound than command. Parables are more like riddles here than a direct spiritual teaching. But we are used to parables being predictable and that is often reflected in our interpretations of them.
- **Who Hears and How (Mark 4:9, 11-13)** The question is do we read these riddles as a prescription of how the world should be or as a description of the world as it is? Jesus quotes Isaiah 6 in these verses, and but if he talks about how the world should be it is jarring. Why would he use vibrant everyday stories just to tell people that they are never meant to understand him. But if he talks (apocalyptically) helping us to understand the world as it is, then

these stories are meant to be understood. It might take work to understand them, and it will require a change of heart, but Jesus is set on taking us closer to truth.

- **Mystery** Jesus proceeds to give the allegorical breakdown of terms for this parable on seed and soils, we do not often get that with other parables. The Greek word *mystērion* from verse 11 is key to this parable and, as Luke Timothy Johnson argues, key to the entire gospel of Mark. In Mark, Jesus and the kingdom of God are inseparably connected. And yet the mystery of the divine work in our lives still remains. It is often like a seed dropped into the dark soil. Bobbi believes that Jesus is not the sower in the parable, but he is the seed. And we are the soil, and all our life experiences and the season we're in can either make us open or make us closed. And the sower is anything that scatters truth in our lives.
- **It Gets Better** Then Jesus tells three more quick parables (lamp, plant, mustard seed). They remind us that the kingdom is full of surprises. "God's way in the world, seen in the life of Christ is generous and gregarious. It involves you and it doesn't totally need you. It's unruly and yet it fits into the palm of your hand." Bobbi invited us to have an ecological reading of these parables and to apply them in our lives these week by giving ourselves over to the way of things: embracing life and grieving death, seeing the kingdom in the gifts of nature.

**Connect:** Share about one thing that really connected with you in the past week and that you're still thinking about.

**Share:** When Bobbi talked about the purpose of Jesus speaking in parables, or riddles, she asked "Why is it good to be confused about God?" How would you answer this question?

Where did you experience confusion about God in your life and what was the fruit of that? In what way was that confusion good for you or lead you into a deeper truth?

**Reflect:** Bobbi suggested that through parables we see that Jesus is more interested in the world as it is, not as we pretend it to be (or how it should be), and that parables are riddles that are meant to be understood and the truth of which is meant to change us.

*"What if Jesus is absolutely interested in the world as it is, not as we might pretend it to be? What if Jesus is into our scrappy planet? Our evolving consciousness? Our attempts, after utter failure, to get up and try again?"*

How does this perspective influence your understanding of the parables or affects the way you see (or struggle to see) God at work in the world?

**Engage:** What are some of the traditional interpretations of the seed and four soils that you encountered before?

Bobbi suggested that the sower in the parable could be anything that scatters truth in your life.

What are the "sowers" in your own life right now? Or how did you discover truth in unexpected ways in the past?

*"So I offer a fresh perspective on the sower. I think the sower is anything – anything that scatters truth in your life."*

*It's the truth of the Euclid telescope's majestic images of galaxies bringing us a new understanding of the universe.*

*It's the truth of how brief and precious a life can be after a friend passes away.*

*It's the truth of a podcast you hadn't even planned to listen to – reminding you that you can heal from pain.*

*Truth is scattered into our lives through: A great film.*

*A hard conversation with a friend.*

*A character in a novel that makes you feel less alone.*

*A doctor's appointment. A walk in the park.*

*A stranger in line at the store.*

*God scatters truth in boundless ways.*

*Wherever you are right now is the place where you can hear it."*

**Take away:** The kingdom isn't something that we can contain or control, but it's also generous and gregarious, and always inviting us into more.

How are you holding those two aspects of the kingdom in your life right now - the mystery and the goodness? Where is generosity and abundance, and where is unpredictability?

**Pray:**

*Loving God,*

*We thank you for the legacy of the parables,*

*Tiny stories that pack a powerful punch of mystery and promise, and profound truths.*

*Christ of every compelling narrative,*

*Of our beginnings, middles, and endings*

*May we find in you the invitation to be open to what is true*

*Even when it's hard, especially when it requires our humility,*

*And may we meet the truth with a desire to change, expand, and grow in love.*

*Spirit of the living God, present with us now,*

*Enter the places of our isolation, our failed imagination, and our hopelessness and heal us of all that harms us.*

*Amen.*