

## Focus on Mark 4:26–34

### WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Judith Hoch Wray  
Verse 28. The earth produces “of itself” (*automatē*, from which we derive “automatic”). In the OT and later Jewish texts, the term referred to that which was worked by God alone, without human effort. An ongoing theological debate among Jewish and Christian thinkers has continued from Jesus’ time until now: Does the coming of the final redemption depend on God’s will alone, or does human effort make a difference? Mark asserts that while humans are called to “sow” or to “scatter the seed,” the growth is completely up to God. The fulfillment comes in stages—first . . . , then . . . , then . . . For now, the one who scatters does not understand the process and can only wait patiently.

### WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Wendy Farley  
Our difficulty arises in confusing the way of the kingdom with our ordinary way of doing things. Jesus is calling us to a very different way of being with ourselves, with one another, with the divine, by asking us to recognize that spiritual growth and intimacy with God arises as naturally as seeds growing. The harvest will come without us having to work for it, because God adores us and it is this love that is the power of growth. It is this love that transforms the tiniest and most impotent-looking seed into a lush bush that gives rest and shade to the singing birds.

### SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Don E. Saliers  
We do well to continue pondering the inexhaustible range of meanings these stories of Jesus about the kingdom generate. The saving act of God in Jesus Christ remains both revealed and veiled to us in this life, just as it remained so for the first communities. To follow this teller of parables is to become alive to all the paradoxes and the tensions of his life and death: goodness appears in human form, and human powers are threatened; yet death leads to life. We struggle to understand while yet standing under the signs of God’s offer of life.

### NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,”  
Nibs Stroupe  
There is also an emphasis on the mystery and surprise of God. We live in an age when the mystery and surprise of all of life, including God’s power, are being squeezed out of our consciousness. This parable asks us not to close our imaginations too quickly, because there is a dynamic, vital power that is mysteriously beyond our comprehension and our grasp. In this parable, Jesus suggests that history has been made ready, just as fields are readied to be planted. The world has been made ready, and now God’s reign has burst on the stage of history in the life of Jesus.