

Praying the Parables Week 4: The seed that grows unseen

Resources for prayer and reflection

He also said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. ²⁸The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. ²⁹But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.' [Mark 4: 26-29]

Parables are speech as seed: the purposeful word of God that once sown, sprouts and grows mysteriously in our minds and hearts until the moment for a response comes.

As there are movements within this parable, so there are movements in our prayerful reception of the word of God:

- As we hear the word, we allow the seed to settle in the soil of our awareness, noticing any word, phrase or image that seems to draw us in some way
- The word begins to sprout and grow: We reflect on these words about seeds and their growth... the way they speak to us...how they connect with the place where we are...how God reaches out to us through them
- The stalk and then the head of grain: We share with God the thoughts, feelings, hopes and desires these words have awoken in us. We listen to how God speaks to us.
- All this is happening by night and by day, mysteriously, with our cooperation, but not something we are making happen; it is gift of God. Within this prayer, while we are sometimes active in thought, at other moments we are in a place of night-time rest, letting God take us deeper into what has been sown within us and is now growing in our heart
- The time for harvest comes, when what is invited of us is our response. The word we receive is living and active – not just informing us but also transforming us in so far as we actively cooperate with it.

Growing by night and by day:

Within the growth of God-life, as within Creation, night has its necessary place:

- Activity, *and* passivity / waiting

- Moving *and* resting.
- Understanding, *and* trust within absence of understanding.
Night belongs to the rhythm of our lives every bit as much as day. The book of Genesis describes God creating the two, night and day, the underlying rhythm of being and becoming.

In the darkness – whatever its cause and effects might be for you – life goes on growing if only you can be receptive to it. You can't make light happen; it will come when it comes. And the darkness itself holds its invitation, for God dwells here too. Rest...be receptive. As you see shoots grow, cooperate with that movement. Night and day, while you sleep and while you wake, the seed is sprouting and growing, though you may not know how. Within this darkness God is working.

There is day and there is night. When darkness falls, and you cannot see your way, and you cannot manage your experience it is time to rest in God. Your feelings are likely to protest; this is an unfamiliar way. But 'leave comfort root room'. Rather than flounder about trying to make something happen, be the place where God is happening – another dark place where a seed is stirring unseen into being...another Bethlehem.

With a poem, it helps to read it aloud; notice how the sentences run between the lines.

My own heart let me more have pity on; let
Me live to my sad self hereafter kind,
Charitable; not live this tormented mind
With this tormented mind tormenting yet.
I cast for comfort I can no more get
By groping round my comfortless, than blind
Eyes in their dark can day or thirst can find
Thirst's all-in-all in all a world of wet.

Soul, self; come, poor Jackself, I do advise
You, jaded, let be; call off thoughts awhile
Elsewhere; leave comfort root-room; let joy size
At God knows when to God knows what; whose smile
's not wrung, see you; unforeseen times rather — as skies
Between pie mountains — lights a lovely mile.

Gerard Manley Hopkins



Befriend the night:

Go out on a clear night – away from street lights if you can – and gaze up at the stars.

Some Bible readings for prayer and reflection:

Psalm 8 / Psalm 42 / Isaiah 42.16 / Isaiah 26.1-9 / Matthew 4.12-17

A Prayer for the Dark

Winter reminds us of how much darkness is part of our experience of life. The nights are long and light lasts a few brief hours. We tend to see darkness negatively as the absence of light. Darkness may carry with it a sense of threat or danger. We are not in control in the same way as we are when we can see our way. We make artificial lights to avoid the unknown of night. When we are in trouble, confused or in pain we may feel ourselves to be 'lost in the dark'. And yet many of us will have learnt as children to close our eyes when we pray.

We let go of the stimulation of our moment by moment existence to rest in a presence that is in every moment and beyond every moment.

God is in the darkness as well as in the light.

Night invites a deeper trust to that presence and care that is always there.

Night bids us relinquish our weary efforts to micro-manage life

We let go – not into nothingness – but into Love...hidden from us perhaps, but very real.

God bids us rest.

Find a physical dark space. Turn off the lights.

You might want to light a candle but be open to the darkness surrounding it that makes this light shine so brightly and warmly.

Sit quietly, relaxing into the moment.

As worries, concerns, thoughts and fears come to mind
neither fight them, nor cling to them.

Let them come and go, passing them over into the darkness.

Rest the palms of your hands on your thighs, turned upwards and open;
that way your preoccupations can slip away from your grasp
and God can look after them for you.

You may feel you want to move away:

darkness and stillness allows inner anxieties and hurts to surface;
they can seem overwhelming.

But stay in the dark.

Just as your eyes slowly adjust to the night
so you might begin to sense the presence of a Love you can trust and rest in,
surrounding and enveloping you, clothing you with kindness...

Thoughts and words of prayer may come,

but you may also find it enough to simply rest without need for words.

There is no need here for explanation, and often words fall so short.

It is enough to 'be'.

Because the God of love is so close to you, you cannot see him.

Because divine light so dazzles you, you are in darkness.

But you are in God

