

Good Morning,

I would like to start today's message with a story about raising chickens.

A life-long city man, tired of the rat race, decided he was going to give up the city life, move to the country, and become a chicken farmer. He bought a nice chicken farm and moved it. As it turned out, his next-door neighbor was also a chicken farmer. The neighbor came for a visit one day and said, "Chicken farming isn't easy. Tell you what. To help you get started, I'll give you 100 chickens. "The new chicken farmer was thrilled. Two weeks later the new neighbor stopped by to see how things were going. The new farmer said, "Not too well. All 100 chickens died." The neighbor said, "Oh, I can't believe that. I've never had any trouble with my chickens. I'll give you 100 more." Another two weeks went by, and the neighbor stopped in again. The new farmer said, "You're not going to believe this, but the second 100 chickens died, too." Astounded, the neighbor asked, "What went wrong?" "Well," said the new farmer, "I'm not sure whether I'm planting them too deep or too close together."

So, why did I just tell a chicken joke to begin our message today? The purpose of our chicken joke this morning is to get us thinking about how life begins for God's plants and creatures. Now, this would be a great opportunity to ask, "Which came first the chicken or the egg?" but I decided against that. Also this would also be a good time to ask, "Why did the chicken cross the road?" but I decided against that too. But the question I did decide to ask is, "How do a seeds grow into a plants?" As Jan and I have travel to church every Sunday, we have had the wonderful pleasure of seeing the crops beginning to grow in the fields. I am always amazed to see the change from barren plowed fields to a sea of green struggling its way up through the soil to find the sunlight light it so desperately needs to grow. And today's message is going to be about how that struggle to grow takes place in bringing about new life into this world. Jesus, also, understood this cycle of life as He explains it to us in His "Parable of the Growing Seed" from Mark 4: 26-29, ***"He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."*** Did you know that there's something really special about this parable? You see, what's special is that Jesus doesn't attempt to explain it's meaning to us as He does in so many of His other parables. Jesus just leaves it's meaning for us to understand on our own. But within

the parable Jesus does tells us that the **“seed would sprout and grow”** but then tells us that the planter does **“not know how”** it sprouts and grows. So let me ask this question, **“Do we know how it sprouts and grows?”** Well of course we do, we just put it in the ground, add water, wait a few days and presto there it is, poking up through the ground all green and pretty. But did we miss something in our simple answer? Maybe we missed the part of the parable that says, **“The earth produces of itself”**? And next we need to ask ourselves this really difficult question, **“How does the earth produce of itself?”** Would you believe that I have another story to help with our answer? But I must confess that I have told this story to you once before so you may already know of the punch line. **“One day a group of scientists got together and decided that man had come a long way and no longer needed God. So they picked one scientist to go and tell Him that they were done with Him. The scientist walked up to God and said, “God, we've decided that we no longer need you. We're to the point that we can clone people and do many miraculous things, so why don't you just go on and mind your own business?” God listened very patiently and kindly to the man. After the scientist was done talking, God said, “Very well, how about this? Let's say we have a man-making contest.” To which the scientist replied, “Okay, we can handle that!” “But,” God added, “we're going to do this just like I did back in the old days with Adam.” The scientist said, “Sure, no problem” and bent down and grabbed himself a handful of dirt. God looked at him and said, “No, no, no. You go get your own dirt.”** So there we have it, we now know that the secret to making new life is in dirt of this earth and maybe this is what Jesus was referring to when He stated in His parable that, “The earth produces of itself”. But maybe Jesus was talking about a lot more than just the dirt of this earth. Maybe Jesus was referring to part of God's creation story in Genesis 1: 9-11, **“And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it.”** Earlier in our service, you were each handed a seed, and I would like for you to place that seed now in your hand. As you are holding the seed take a good look at it and amaze at the wonder of life that you hold. Amaze at the presence of part of God's creation story right there in you hand. You know as a child, when I looked at a seed, I had no idea that it held

life within its shell. But as I grew older and found myself sitting in Mr. Paul's biology class, I began to realize just how fascinating it was to watch life actually come into this world. But then like so many other students I was curious to know how it happens that life came out of something that I thought was non-living in the first place. Well the first thing that I discovered is that a seed is actually alive to begin with. In fact inside of the seed is a tiny plant with a root and leaf, with its own food supply, just waiting for the right combination of events to happen to tell it that it is now to start growing out of its protective shell. So, what are the right combinations of events that need to happen? First off, the seed needs to be within the right kind of soil or environment. Then the seed needs to be in the right temperature and finally the seed needs to have available water. And then when all of these events happen together at the right time the seed sprouts by casting off its shell, planting its tiny root into the soil and sending its tiny leaf up through the soil in search of finding sunlight. So now that we've had our morning lesson in biology, let's ask ourselves a couple of questions; why does Jesus use a growing seed to illustrate a message for us to learn from? And what exactly is the message that He wants us to learn? As we think a little deeper about the "Parable of the Growing Seed" we might see that our lives are just like growing seeds. Could it be that inside of each and every one of us there is an unlimited potential just waiting to become the person that God wants us to be? And could it also be that this unlimited potential of ours is just like that "tiny plant" inside the seed that is also waiting to become the plant God wants it to be? So what does it take to unleash this unlimited potential that we have inside of us? Well, what it takes, is the very same thing that a seed needs to unleash its "tiny plant" into the world, the right environment. We know from our earlier biology lesson, this morning, that the environment needed for the seed to grow is an environment where the temperature is just right, where the nutrients from the soil are just right and where the availability of water is just right. So, what is the right environment for us to grow in? As growing children of God we need to find ourselves surrounded by the right people. As growing children of God we need to find nourishment to feed our minds and bring faith into our hearts. And as children of God we need to find living water to cleanse away the sins of this earth. So today, as we find ourselves sitting here in church, do we feel that we are living in the right environment for our unlimited potential to continue to grow into whom God wants us to be. Are we living among people who love us, and care for us or are we living with people who bring us down and take away our joy in this world. Are we finding ourselves being replenished with experiences where we

see God's work in this world or are we being replenished with experiences where God does not exist? And, have we received the living water of an eternal life or have we received the stagnant water of an earthly life? And just like the seed that is planted in the ground we too need the right environment for us to realize our full and unlimited potential to a life filled with joy and God's love. I would like to close our message today with the reading of three bible verses that represent God's Word speaking to us about the aspects of each of the three parts of the right environment for us to become the person God's want us to be. Our first verse represents the right kind of people for us to be surrounded by for us to continue to grow in the Lord. From Colossians 3:12-14 ***"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."*** Our second verse represents the right kind of nourishment we need to receive for us to continue to grow in the Lord. From 2 Peter 1:5-8 ***"For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."*** And our last verse represents the right kind of living water we need for us to continue to grow in the Lord. From John 4:13-15; ***"Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."*** So, lets take another look at the seed that you have in your hand. Do you feel the spiritual potential within you to become who God wants you to be? Do you feel the spiritual energy that is waiting to be unleashed within you to become who God wants you to be? And do you feel the spiritual gift of God's living water that will make it all happen? Amen.

As we think a little deeper about the “Parable of the Growing Seed” we might see that our earthly lives are like a growing seeds. But we might also see that our spiritual lives are like a growing seed as well.

In the Gospel of Matthew (13:10–17) Jesus provides an answer when asked about his use of parables:[18]

The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" He replied,

"The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables:

Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand."

While Mark 4:33–34 and Matthew 13:34–35 may suggest that Jesus would only speak to the "crowds" in parables, while in private explaining everything to his disciples, modern scholars do not support the private explanations argument and surmise that Jesus used parables as a teaching method.[19] Dwight Pentecost suggests that given that Jesus often preached to a mixed audience of believers and non-believers, he used parables to reveal the truth to some, but hide it from others.[1]

Christian author Ashton Axenden suggests that Jesus constructed his parables based on his divine knowledge of how man can be taught:[20]

This was a mode of teaching, which our blessed Lord seemed to take special delight in employing. And we may be quite sure, that as "He knew what was in man" better than we know, He would not have taught by Parables, if He had not felt that this was the kind of teaching best suited to our wants.

In the 19th century, Lisco and Fairbairn stated that in the parables of Jesus, "the image borrowed from the visible world is accompanied by a truth from the invisible (spiritual) world" and that the parables of Jesus are not "mere similitudes which serve the purpose of illustration, but are internal analogies where nature becomes a witness for the spiritual world".[3]

Similarly, in the 20th century, calling a parable "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning", [21] William Barclay states that the parables of Jesus use familiar examples to lead men's minds towards heavenly concepts. He suggests that Jesus did not form his parables merely as analogies but based on an "inward affinity between the natural and the spiritual order." [21]

Inside each seed there is an unseen potential, a big strong tree is metaphorically inside this tiny seed. The only way to get that big tree out is to make sure that the seed is planted, watered, exposed to sunlight and with ample time the seed will begin to sprout and grow.

Symbols and Explanation

Jesus does not explain the meaning of this parable. Nevertheless, we can understand what the symbols stand for by their use in the Parable of the Sower as recorded in Mark 4 (see verses 3-8 and 4-20).

I. The Man Casting the Seed: A man casting seed is the same as a sower. In Mark 4:14, Jesus says, "The sower soweth the word." This identifies the sower as someone who spreads the Gospel. As I explained in "The Parable of the Sower," the indication is that the Parable of the Sower primarily applies to Jesus' ministry.

Although the Parable of the Seed Growing by Itself contains lessons that anyone who spreads the Gospel can learn from, because Mark 4:29 says of the same man who casts the seed that "he putteth in the sickle," I believe we should understand the man in this parable as referring to Jesus. Of course, when someone preaches the Gospel, he does so under the authority of Jesus, as an extension of Jesus' ministry, and, therefore, it can be thought of as Jesus spreading the Word.

Man casting the seed=Jesus Christ

II. The Seed: Referring back to Mark 4:14, we see that Jesus identifies what the sower sows—the seed—as "the word." (In Matthew 13:38, referring to the Parable of the Tares of the Field, Jesus says, "The good seed are the children of the kingdom." But, because Mark excludes that parable, there is no reason to use Jesus' explanation for that parable here in Mark.)

Seed=Word of God preached in the world

With this information, we see that the man "casts" seed to the earth. The word "cast" is *balē*, meaning "throws." It suggests that the planting of this seed is not careful. It is thrown indiscriminately. Therefore, in this way, it matches the picture in the Parable of the Sower of the Seed. That is, the seed falls where it may. This is a picture of the Gospel being preached and published indiscriminately to all the earth. We then learn that the man sleeps and rises, night and day. I see no reason to take this as having any greater significance than showing the passage of time. During this time, the seed sprouts and grows; that is, the Word of God results in people becoming Christians.

We now read that the man does not know how this happens. This should not be seen as a deficiency in the man. Jesus' intention is not to say anything about the man here, but to express that a mystery is at work here. He is conveying a concept similar to what He said to Nicodemus: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). In other words, we should see that the way in which the Gospel brings forth a harvest of saved people is a mystery. In Romans 1:16, Paul says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." What we see in this parable is the power of God in the Word being preached. Just as it is a mystery how something so mundane looking as a seed can bring forth a plant that produces fruit, so it is a mystery how the Gospel results in Christians.

The first part of Mark 4:28 says, "For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself." "Of herself" is translated from the Greek word *automatē*. As you might imagine, this word can be translated "automatically." The Parable of the Seed Growing by Itself is a direct contradiction of preachers who think they have to plead, have altar calls, use music, or add any other gimmicks to the Word of God. This parable teaches that all the preacher has to do is cast the seed—preach the Gospel. The rest, at least from our point of view, will happen by itself.

III. The Good Seed: In verse 38, Jesus says, "The good seed are the children of the kingdom." In the Parable of the Sower, the seed is the Word of God. In this parable, Jesus has changed the symbolism. Unless Jesus has clearly changed the symbolism, we should assume that it remains the same from parable to parable. In this case, Jesus has changed the meaning of "seed."

The word "children" is from the Greek word *huios*, which means "sons." I believe that this is significant because, in the culture in which Jesus spoke this parable, it would have been understood that sons, not just children in general, inherited. These sons—and this includes all true believers of either sex—are those who will hear, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

Good seed=sons of the kingdom

IV. Sequence of Growth: The second part of Mark 4:28 describes the sequence of growth: "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." This is talking about growth, from the time of seeing the first green blades of grain plants sprouting from the ground to the time of harvest.

But when is this harvest that Jesus is talking about? It is true that in Matthew 13:39, Jesus says, "the harvest is the end of the world." But Mark does not include such a statement, and I believe this was inspired so as not to cause confusion. The parable that Jesus is explaining in Matthew 13:37-50 is illustrating something different.

Remember, as I have already pointed out, in Matthew 13:38, Jesus says, "the good seed are the children of the kingdom." But in Mark 4, the seed is the Word. So, Mark 4:28 is not talking about the harvest at the end of the world when the children of the kingdom will be separated from the children of the wicked one. This harvest in Mark is talking about a different kind of harvest altogether.

In John 4:35, Jesus says, "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." This was a harvest that was ready even at that time. Referring back to the mission that Jesus had sent his apostles on, He says, "For

herein is the saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye have not labored: others have labored, and ye are entered into their labor" (John 4:37-38). In other words, the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist, and Jesus have sown the Word that was now bearing ripe grain for the apostles to harvest. I believe it is significant that the word "sent" in John 4:38 and the word poorly translated as "he putteth in" in Mark 4:29 is the same Greek word. The word is apostellō. It is the verb form of apostolos, which is the Greek word for apostle. Apostellō means to send forth on a mission. Apostolos is one who is sent forth on a mission. In John 4:38, Jesus is telling His disciples that He had sent them on a mission to reap in the harvest. In Mark 4:29, Jesus is saying basically the same thing. When the time of the harvest is come, the One who sowed the Word—in this case, Jesus—sends forth on a mission "the sickle." Who, then, is the sickle? The sickle represents the apostles, the ones sent forth on a mission. They are to harvest the people who come to fruition because of the sown Word.

Harvest=people in whom the Word of God grows and are then gathered into the kingdom
Sickle=those sent to harvest people into the kingdom of God

5 We know that our body—the tent we live in here on earth—will be destroyed. But when that happens, God will have a home for us to live in. It will not be the kind of home people build here. It will be a home in heaven that will continue forever.

Jesus did not explain this parable, as He did some others. Instead, He left it to us to understand its meaning. Taking the seed to be the Word of God, as in Mark 4:14, we

can interpret the growth of the plants as the working of God's Word in individual hearts. The fact that the crop grows without the farmer's intervention means that God can accomplish His purposes even when we are absent or unaware of what He's doing. The goal is the ripened grain. At the proper time, the Word will bring forth its fruit, and the Lord of the harvest (Luke 10:2) will be glorified

Beans with crosses on them

Inside each seed there is an unseen potential, a big strong tree is metaphorically inside this tiny seed. The only way to get that big tree out is to make sure that the seed is planted, watered, exposed to sunlight and with ample time the seed will begin to sprout and grow.

Our life is like a seed.

Inside of us there is unlimited potential. If we want to tap into our full potential we will need to be in the right environment, surrounded by the right people, nourished mentally, physically, spiritually. Over time our true potential will be unleashed and just like the tree your life will bear fruits.

Tell story biology class growing beans from seeds.

Background Information

All seeds consist of two parts, the little plant or embryo and the seed coat. The seed coat protects the developing plant; the embryo is inside the seed. Cotyledons store food. They are the leaves that are attached to the little plant or embryo.

When the seed begins to grow, one part of the embryo becomes the root and the rest becomes the upper stem and leaves.

Their discovery sheds light on the genetic mechanisms that plants use to detect and respond to vital environmental cues and could be a significant step towards the development of new crop species that are resistant to climate change and would help secure future food supplies. The work is published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Seeds in the soil sense a whole range of environmental signals including temperature, light, moisture and nutrients, when deciding whether to germinate or to remain dormant.

To ensure that the decision for a seed to germinate is made at the perfect moment to ensure survival, evolution has genetically “wired” seeds in a very complex way to avoid making potentially deadly mistakes.

Jan laughed when I bought a four-foot pole for my tomatoes, my plant will not grow that high, having high expectations.

Jewish texts compare the knowable universe to the size of a mustard seed to demonstrate the world's insignificance and to teach humility.[8] The Jewish philosopher Nahmanides mentions the universe expanded from the time of its creation, in which it was the size of a mustard seed.[9]

Phys.org) —The universe may have existed forever, according to a new model that applies quantum correction terms to complement Einstein's theory of general relativity. The model may also account for dark matter and dark energy, resolving multiple problems at once. The widely accepted age of the universe, as estimated by general relativity, is 13.8 billion years. In the beginning, everything in existence is thought to have occupied a single infinitely dense point, or singularity. Only after this point began to expand in a "Big Bang" did the universe officially begin.

Although the Big Bang singularity arises directly and unavoidably from the mathematics of general relativity, some scientists see it as problematic because the math can explain only what happened immediately after—not at or before—the singularity. "The Big Bang singularity is the most serious problem of general relativity because the laws of physics appear to break down there," Ahmed Farag Ali at Benha University and the Zewail City of Science and Technology, both in Egypt, told Phys.org. Ali and coauthor Saurya Das at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada, have shown in a paper published in Physics Letters B that the Big Bang singularity can be resolved by their new model in which the universe has no beginning and no end.

Jesus proclaimed Himself to be the "Alpha and Omega" in Revelation 1:8, 11; 21:6; and 22:13. Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Among the Jewish rabbis, it was common to use the first and the last letters of the Hebrew alphabet to denote the whole of anything, from beginning to end. Jesus as the beginning and end of all things is a reference to no one but the true God. This statement of eternity could apply only to God. It is seen especially in Revelation 22:13, where Jesus proclaims that He is "the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

One of the meanings of Jesus being the "Alpha and Omega" is that He was at the beginning of all things and will be at the close. It is equivalent to saying He always existed and always will exist. It was Christ, as second Person of the Trinity, who brought about the creation: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3), and His Second Coming will be the beginning of the end of creation as we know it (2 Peter 3:10). As God incarnate, He has no beginning, nor will He have any end with respect to time, being from everlasting to everlasting.

5 We know that our body—the tent we live in here on earth—will be destroyed. But when that happens, God will have a home for us to live in. It will not be the kind of home people build here. It will be a home in heaven

that will continue forever. **2** But now we are tired of this body. We want God to give us our heavenly home. **3** It will clothe us and we will not be naked. **4** While we live in this tent, we have burdens and so we complain. I don't mean that we want to remove this tent, but we want to be clothed with our heavenly home. Then this body that dies will be covered with life. **5** This is what God himself made us for. And he has given us the Spirit as the first payment to guarantee the life to come. **6** So we always have confidence. We know that while we live in this body, we are away from the Lord. **7** We live by what we believe will happen, not by what we can see. **8** So I say that we have confidence. And we really want to be away from this body and be at home with the Lord. **9** Our only goal is to always please the Lord, whether we are living here in this body or there with him.

2 Corinthians 5: 7 For we cannot clearly see him in this life, wherein we walk by faith only: an evidence, indeed, that necessarily implies a kind of "seeing him who is invisible;" yet as far beneath what we shall have in eternity, as it is above that of bare, unassisted reason.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

30 He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? **31** It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; **32** yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

Mark 4: 26 So is the kingdom of God— The inward kingdom is like seed which a man casts into the ground— This a preacher of the Gospel casts into the heart. And he sleeps and rises night and day— That is, he has it continually in his thoughts. Meantime it springs and grows up he knows not how— Even he that sowed it cannot explain how it grows. For as the earth by a curious kind of mechanism, which the greatest philosophers cannot comprehend, does as it were spontaneously bring forth first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear: so the soul, in an inexplicable manner, brings forth, first weak graces, then stronger, then full

holiness: and all this of itself, as a machine, whose spring of motion is within itself. Yet observe the amazing exactness of the comparison. The earth brings forth no corn (as the soul no holiness) without both the care and toil of man, and the benign influence of heaven.