

MARK

Chapter 4

The Parable of the Sower

Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. 2 And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 3 **“Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” 9 And he said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”**

4:1–34 First of two extended sections of teaching in Mk (cf 13:3–37). Parables here repeatedly draw comparisons with things from everyday life in order to clarify how God plants and grows His kingdom. Jesus reveals both grace and judgment in these parables. (TLSB)

4:1–9 Though typically called “the parable of the sower,” this story’s main point has more to do with the four kinds of soil than with the one sowing seed. Cf vv 14–20 for the parable’s interpretation. (TLSB)

4:1 *Sat in it.* Sitting was the usual position for Jewish teachers (see Mt 5:1; Lk 5:3; Jn 8:2). (CSB)

4:2 *parables.* Usually stories out of ordinary life used to illustrate spiritual or moral truth, sometimes in the form of brief similes, comparisons (see note on 3:23), analogies or proverbial sayings. Ordinarily they had a single main point, and not every detail was meant to have significance. (CSB)

4:3–8 In that day seed was broadcast by hand—which, by its nature, scattered some seed on unproductive ground. (CSB)

4:3 *sower.* A farmer planting seed. (TLSB)

sow. After seed was sown, an oxen-drawn harrow (or even a flock of sheep or goats) was driven through the field to turn the soil over the seed. (TLSB)

4:4 *the path.* Packed-down soil. (TLSB)

4:5–6 Shallow soil over large stones warms up quickly after the winter cold, and so helps the seeds germinate and sprout quickly. Because such soil has no depth, however, the seedlings cannot sink healthy roots. (TLSB)

4:7 A variety of thorny weeds grow in Israel, some as tall as 6 ft. Like all weeds, these deplete the soil of nutrients, leaving little for the plants being cultivated. (TLSB)

4:8 *multiplying ... a hundred times.* A hundredfold yield was an unusually productive harvest (see Ge 26:12). Harvest was a common figure for the consummation of God's kingdom (see Joel 3:13; Rev 14:14–20). (CSB)

This plant produces grain abundantly in comparison to the single grain sown. Even a hundredfold increase is attested! Cf Mt 19:29. (TLSB)

4:9 Jesus challenges the hearer to consider carefully what has just been said and apply it to his or her life. This saying appears frequently in the NT (e.g., v 23; Mt 13:43; Lk 14:35; Rv 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). (TLSB)

4:1–9 The parable of the sower helps explain why not everyone who hears the Gospel believes it and bears the fruit of faith. Such failures are seemingly more common today than ever, even among traditionally Christian peoples. At the same time, the Word of the Lord accomplishes His good purpose. It works miracles in lives where the Spirit has His way. • Lord, continue to plant Your Word richly in us. Remove the stones and weeds that impede Your Word, and thereby bring forth a harvest of mature fruit in all who believe. Amen. (TLSB)

The Purpose of the Parables

10 And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. **11** And he said to them, **“To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, 12 so that “they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.”** **13** And he said to them, **“Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? 14 The sower sows the word. 15 And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. 16 And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. 17 And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. 18 And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. 20 But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”**

4:10 The disciples still did not have “ears to hear” (v 9), and so had to ask Jesus for an explanation about the parable of the sower. Perhaps because they were too embarrassed to reveal their lack of understanding in public, they asked Jesus for an explanation in private. (TLSB)

4:11 *To you has been given.* Before interpreting the parable of the sower for His disciples, Jesus first made clear that human beings cannot understand divine revelation unless given insight by God Himself. (TLSB)

secret of the kingdom of God.† In the NT “secret” refers to something God has revealed to his people. The secret (that which was previously unknown) is proclaimed to all, but only those who have faith understand. In this context the secret seems to be that the kingdom of God had drawn near in the coming of Jesus Christ. See Da 2 for a description of the kingdom of God as compared with earthly kingdoms. (CSB)

This mystery has everything to do with a proper understanding of Jesus and His mission. Unfortunately, the disciples have still not understood Jesus' divinity and the nature of His

mission. Particularly troublesome for them will be the idea that their Messiah has to suffer in order to complete His mission (cf 8:31–33; 9:30–32; 10:35–45). (TLSB)

4:12 *so that*. Jesus likens his preaching in parables to the ministry of Isaiah, which, while it gained some disciples (Isa 8:16), was also to expose the hardhearted resistance of the many to God’s warning and appeal. (CSB)

Note from Matthew 13:14–15: Jesus quoted Is 6:9–10 to show that He was fulfilling Scripture when He spoke in parables. The Lord commissioned Isaiah to preach to Israel, knowing that the people would not understand what they heard or saw. Jesus taught the unbelieving crowds in parables because they continued to reject Him. (TLSB)

Note from Isaiah 6:9: *go tell this people* – The emphasis lies on His saying “this,” not “My,” as if He were saying “rejected,” “accursed.” We do not here wish anxiously to torture ourselves regarding the secret will of God, but only to set forth those matters concerning the mood of God and of His preachers. For God is justly angry with the stubborn who please themselves and have no desire to learn to know themselves and to deny themselves. It is to them that this must be said with displeasure. (Luther)

Note from Isaiah 6:10: Isaiah’s message is to preach Law before Gospel, judgment before grace, death before life. The result of Isaiah’s preaching and its purpose are viewed together. “Due to their hardness of heart” (Mk 6:52; Eph 4:18), God’s warning of judgment to come will be rejected by “this people” and seal their doom (cf Mk 4:12; Ac 28:26–27; Rm 11:8). (TLSB)

Jesus makes a sharp distinction between the disciples (to whom God entrusts the mystery of the Kingdom) and the unbelieving multitude (from whom the truth is concealed). Basic to this distinction is the fact that the revelation of God itself has its history of acceptance and rejection whenever it enters the human scene. (Lane)

Some who heard Christ would never come to an understanding. As evidence he quoted the words of Isaiah 6:9,10. In Isaiah’s ministry the time had come when God through the preaching of Isaiah hardened the hearts of many in Israel as a just and righteous punishment. Jesus recognized that a similar time had also come in his own ministry. But nowhere did Jesus say these words of Isaiah applied to everyone of his hearers. (PBC)

Nor does Jesus here say we in our ministry today can apply these words to our hearts. Only God can make a judgment like that. We cannot look into the hearts of people. To the Twelve when he sends them out to preach Jesus says, “And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them” (6:11). But the door for repentance is still ajar. And that’s why the Christians’ present assignment reads: “Preach the good news to all creation” (16:15). (PBC)

Consonant with Isaiah, Jesus seeks to confirm in their resistance those who oppose him and his preaching, teaching, and healing ministry. Furthermore, as he embraces the description of Isaiah’s ministry as his own, Jesus is “saying” not only that (Isaiah) the same God is working in the same way for the same purposes, but also and especially that *his ministry will bring the prior divine visitation in BC times to its final end and fulfillment*. (CC)

This depiction of the divine visitation in Jesus does, however, raise the difficult issue of God working to harden rather than to save. To this, several observations may be made:

1. God is here being true to form, as it were. As detailed above, just as God acted in judgment in Isaiah's day, so he does so here: the same God working in the same way for the same purposes. This includes hardening people in their obstinacy: see Is 63:17.

2. God's action in Jesus is a response to his people's persistent rejection of him. *Hardening is not the "first move" in the sequence.* It follows upon persistent rejection by Israel of her gracious God (see Isaiah 1; 2; 3, and 5).

3. This understanding then raises the larger issue of the almighty, loving God of Israel, Yahweh, hardening people to destruction (not to mention the problem of the existence of evil, demons, etc.). In Mark's Gospel and especially at this point in the narrative, however, this is not the focus or concern. The parable here introduced is a *response* to the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish leadership and—what will develop—by the crowds later on. People are called to "repent and believe in the Gospel" (1:15). To reject this personal presence of God—indeed, to call it demonic (3:22)—issues in rejection in return and final destruction.

4. Otherwise expressed, the deepest issues of theodicy (i.e., the problem of an almighty, loving God and the existence of evil and final condemnation) are not addressed in this text. These verses provide a straightforward answer to the question of what Jesus' response to the rejection of him will be, and they provide a literal, phenomenological description of that response. These verses do not seek to "look behind the veil" at "what is really going on," to discern "what God is really thinking" or is "really up to" (cf. Job), to explain God's attitudes and actions at their most fundamental level. See, by contrast, Paul's theoretical discussion of the work of God in his people's lives generally (Rom 8:28–31), and especially with regard to the Jews (Romans 9–11, especially Rom 11:33–36), as well as Jesus' own consideration of the problem of those killed by Pilate and by the fall of the Tower of Siloam (Lk 13:1–5). (CC)

4:13 *How then will you understand.* Until the disciples believe that Jesus is the Messiah and interpret His teachings in light of His sacrificial suffering and death, they will never comprehend anything about Him. In fact, much of the unfolding plot in Mk involves the struggle of the disciples to accept that the Messiah will be rejected and crucified. (TLSB)

4:14 *the word.* The interpretation calls attention to the response to the word of God that Jesus has been preaching. In spite of many obstacles, God's word will accomplish his purpose. (CSB)

Those sowing God's Word include Jesus Himself, the first disciples, and all subsequent teachers and preachers of the Gospel. The administration of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are included in this sowing activity. (TLSB)

4:15 Just as Jesus can and will be rejected, so also His Word can suffer opposition. The human ego is not the only obstacle to the Word's reception. Satan and his evil hosts also work vigorously against the Word. (TLSB)

4:16-17 Many converts joyfully begin a walk in the faith but then turn away when difficulties come. (TLSB)

4:17 *tribulation or persecution.* Difficulties and troubles will come to all believers, even as they once came to Christ. That is why Jesus repeatedly warns people of the perils of following Him (8:34–35; Mt 10:22) and why His apostles repeatedly urge believers to persevere, despite trials (Gal 6:9; 2Tm 2:1–7; Heb 12:3–11; Jas 1:12; 1Pt 1:13–16; Rv 2:10; 3:11). (TLSB)

4:18-19 Like thorns that choke a growing plant, so the worries and pleasures of the world eradicate the feeble understanding of the Gospel. (TLSB)

4:19 *deceitfulness of riches.* Prosperity tends to give a false sense of self-sufficiency, security and well-being (10:17–25; see Dt 8:17–18; 32:15; Ecc 2:4–11; Jas 5:1–6). (CSB)

unfruitful. Here, as in other places, Jesus makes clear that the barometer of one's faith is not what one says, but rather what one does. In other words, the fruits of faith (good works) are the most accurate indicators of the sincerity of belief. Cf Mt 7:15–20; 12:33; Mk 12:1–9. (TLSB)

4:10–20 Jesus interprets the parable of the sower for His disciples. The failures of the various soils to produce for the Lord are still common: people even now refuse to hear, fall away when hardship comes, and allow worldly concerns to overwhelm their faith. Yet, by God's grace, many receive the Word in good faith and produce richly. Not even the gates of hell can prevail against His Church. • Lord, help us to see and perceive, to hear and understand. Remove every impediment to our faith. Let Your Word bring forth lasting fruit in our lives. Amen. (TLSB)

A Lamp on a Stand

21 And he said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand? 22 For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” 24 And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. 25 For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”

4:21–22 *Is a lamp ... put under.* Rhetorical; it is obviously self-defeating to light a lamp and then hide it. Jesus' followers are supposed to bring the light of the Gospel to the darkness surrounding them. (TLSB)

4:24 Jesus assures His followers that, when they act graciously and righteously toward others, an even greater measure of goodness will come back to them. Cf Gal 6:9. (TLSB)

4:25 *Who has more will be given.* The more we appropriate truth now, the more we will receive in the future; and if we do not respond to what little truth we may know already, we will not profit even from that. (CSB)

4:21–25 Jesus continues the theme of producing for the Kingdom by comparing His people to lamps set on a stand and by promising that faithfulness will be rewarded. It is a great pity, therefore, that so many Christians thwart God's desire to bless faithfulness by failing to put their faith into practice wholeheartedly. The Lord forgives those who repent, and He calls us to focus on His mission. Though we are generous, He is more generous still and blesses more and more. • Lord, thank You for graciously rewarding our small kindnesses with outpourings of even more precious blessings. Amen. (TLSB)

The Parable of the Growing Seed

26 And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. 27 He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. 28 The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. 29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

4:26-34 The three parables in Mark 4—the sower, the mystery of the growing seed, and the mustard seed—have one truth in common: the Word of God is like seed in that it contains his all-sufficient power to create and grow his kingdom. The three parables cast interpretive light on each other. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

Vv 1–8 list four ways the Word may be received. Vv 26–29 illustrate the mysterious process of the Word giving spiritual growth in the hearts of hearers. Vv 30–32 contrast the initially “small” or weak appearance of the Word with its amazing ability to produce the largest and most important kingdom in all the world: the church. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

The *Gospel* contains two parables, both dealing with seed and growth, but each with its own emphasis. The first parable (of the growing seed) is unique to Mark and emphasizes the inevitability of the seed’s growth. The second parable (of the mustard seed) emphasizes the reversal theme of “smallest to largest.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 3)

The parable of the seed growing secretly, also known as the parable of the patient husbandman (vv 26–29): A variety of interpretations have been offered for this parable (which is recorded only in Mark). Some emphasize the growth of the kingdom, while others emphasize its present hiddenness. Some point to the farmer’s patience, some draw attention to his lack of responsibility for the seed’s automatic growth, and others stress his confidence in the harvest. Whichever aspect of the parable is emphasized, this text can bring comfort and confidence to its hearers as they await the harvest. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

Note: Some divide our text into three major paragraphs. The first two paragraphs each contain an individual parable. The third paragraph speaks in general of Jesus' use of parables. (Buls)

Verses 26-29 are found only in Mark. We cannot agree that this parable is Mark's version of Matthew's parable of the tare and wheat found in Matthew 13:24-30. If Luke knew Mark's Gospel or, more importantly, used it to write his Gospel, why did he not include this exquisite parable? (Buls)

Interpreter's Bible says: "Both Matthew and Luke omit the first one (26-29) -- Matthew substitutes for it his parable of the tares (Matthew 13:24-30) -- but it can scarcely be thought that it was not in their edition of Mark. Perhaps they stumbled at the word "*of itself*", as if the kingdom spread by some automatic or physical principle, apart from the will of God or the response of men." The parable of the tares is wholly different from this parable. That is a poor argument. (Buls)

And to say that Matthew and Luke stumbled at what Mark wrote is even worse. These *Notes* do not say that Matthew and Luke did not know Mark's Gospel or that they did not use Mark's Gospel. But this business of "rewriting" or eliminating false ideas shows the utter weakness of the argument of Markan Priority in the sense that Matthew and Luke used and embellished Mark. Markan Priority is still only a theory fraught with real problems. Stick to 2 Timothy 3:16. (Buls)

4:26–29 Only Mark records this parable. Whereas the Parable of the Sower stresses the importance of proper soil for the growth of seed and the success of the harvest, here the mysterious power of the seed itself is emphasized. The gospel message contains its own power. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 3)

Although this parable and the one in vv 1–20 both involve the sowing of seed and its growth, this one makes a different point. (TLSB)

4:26-27 The kingdom of God in both parables is not his kingdom of power (Ps 103:19), nor his kingdom of glory (2 Tim 4:18), but his kingdom of grace, governed by the Gospel. Both our growth in grace and the spread of the Word are outlined well in Luther’s Large Catechism, on the petition “Thy Kingdom Come” (LC III, 52): (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

“We pray here at the outset that all this may be realized in us and that God’s name may be praised through his holy Word and our Christian lives. This we ask, both in order that we who have accepted it may remain faithful and grow daily in it, and in order that it may gain recognition and followers among other people and advance with power throughout the world. So we pray that, led by the Holy Spirit, many may come into the kingdom of grace and become partakers of salvation, so that we may all remain together in this kingdom which has now made its appearance among us.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

In the gospels, Jesus clearly is God’s sower—the one who is broadcasting God’s Word, including the parables. Yet Christ also calls and sends out first the twelve apostles (Mk 6:6–13), and then also the seventy-two disciples (Lk 10:1–12). So when v 27 of our text says that the sower does not know how the seed sprouts and grows, the reference probably is to Christ’s ministers. R. C. Trench (*Notes on the Parables of Our Lord* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1948] 99–100) concludes that the sower is Christ, though not exclusively, since “he does not know how” applies to teachers in the church. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

R. C. H. Lenski (*The Interpretation of Mark’s Gospel* [Columbus: Wartburg, 1946] 186) also writes that Christ is the sower—at great length. He argues this way: “The heavenly sower neither sleeps or slumbers (Ps 121:4), for him there is no night and day, and he who gave the Word certainly knows all about the mysteries of its development in our hearts. What Jesus does in the parable is to compare himself to a man who scatters his seed and trusts that seed to grow of its own power, etc.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

Commentators agree that one should not literalistically interpret every detail, or, as Chrysostom puts it, “press too anxiously all the circumstances of a parable” (quoted in Trench, p. 15). For example, the sower in the parable remains active until the time of the harvest. This should not be pressed to imply that Christ’s return must occur in the lifetime of the original 12 apostles; but it may suggest that Christ will continue to work through his ministers in succession until his return. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

4:26 kingdom of God – Luke 17:20-21 explains it this way, “Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation,²¹ nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.”

Here the kingdom of God is compared to growing seed. The mysterious power of the seed itself is emphasized. The Gospel message contains its own power. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 3)

Koehler states, “It is the rule of Christ in the hearts of his believers. For the individual the Kingdom of God consists in his personal relation to Christ, established by faith, by which he trusts in the grace of his Savior and renders joyful service to his Lord.”

Luther says, Lord's Prayer *Thy kingdom come*, What does this mean? The kingdom of God comes indeed without our prayer, of itself; but we pray in this petition that it may come unto us also. How is this done? The kingdom of God comes to us when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life, here in time and hereafter in eternity.

Here Jesus introduces a particular parable. Compare verse 30. We have direct discourse. (Buls)

Jesus is here speaking about the Kingdom of God. He is describing one characteristic of that Kingdom. Here it is the power inherent in the Gospel to grow until the time of harvest, the end of this age. We say "inherent" because man cannot assist the Gospel. (Buls)

"Of God" has been called possessive, subjective and adjectival genitive. It is all three of these and it is difficult to decide which one is predominant. (Buls)

Note that five verbs in the subjunctive mood appear in verses 26 and 27. The first is aorist to distinguish the sowing in 26 from the growing in 27. (Buls)

Luke 8:11 tells us: "The seed is the Word of God." The point of comparison is the life-giving element. That is implied in Mark 4:26. (Buls)

a man – anthrōpos, "a man." While some believe this man corresponds to Christ, the statement (v 27) that he does not know how the seed grows is problematic for this interpretation. Though God is responsible for the planting, growth, and harvest, he works in his kingdom of grace through human instruments (1 Cor 3:5–10). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

seed – Gospel

Whenever Christ speaks about the kingdom of God, His ruling activity, His words always have something to do with the seed, the gospel that brings men to faith in Christ Jesus. Here Jesus speaks of the power and reliability of the gospel message. All that need be done in fact, all that can be done, is to sow the seed, to proclaim the word. A farmer who plants the seed does not understand how it grows. The power is in the seed. So it is with the gospel. (PBC)

Isaiah 55:11, "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

4:27 GROWS THOUGH HE DOES NOT KNOW HOW – The sprouting is absolutely unaided by man and incomprehensible to man. "Know how" is used of inherent knowledge. The truth found here is axiomatic. People soon learn that the sprouting of seed cannot be hurried nor is its growth comprehensible to man. That's the way it is with the Gospel. (Buls)

Although the farmer plays an important role in the cultivation of his field – after all, he sows the seed – its growth occurs apart from his efforts, even as he sleeps. Even today, many aspects of horticulture remain a mystery. The more one studies nature, the more one marvels at its intricacy, as well as the wisdom and power of its Lord. (TLSB)

1 Peter 2:2 “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.”

2 Peter 3:18 “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.”

4:28-29 How the lowly seed sprouts and grows until the grain is ripe, ready to be harvested, is God’s miracle. So also is it beyond human comprehension how the Word of God creates and nurtures faith and other characteristics of the Christian (Rom 1:16, 10:17; Eph 4:13–16; 2 Pet 3:18). So the job of the minister is to freely disseminate the Gospel without modifying God’s Word to suit his own limited understanding. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

Does the harvest refer to each believer’s time of departure? Or does it mean Judgment Day itself? The latter is probably meant, in harmony with the parables of the wheat and the tares (Mt 13:40–43) and the sheep and goats (Mt 25:31–46). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

4:28 by itself – Here the emphasis is on the inevitability of the seed’s growth. The Greek word here is *automata*, from which we get our English word *automatic*. But the automatic growth of the seed is not due to blind and impersonal determinism. It is rather the work of God Himself. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 3)

"All by itself" is found only here and Acts 12:10 in the New Testament. We use an adverb or adverbial phrase where the Greek uses an adjective. This verse does not mean that the earth PRODUCES life. The point is that man cannot understand how seed germinates and grows. Nor can he understand how the Word can cause conversion and sanctification. (Buls)

The earth does not actually produce growth “by itself.” The plant owes its growth to the power of God, who both creates and sustains order (cf. v 26). Growth in the Kingdom is similarly the result of God’s Word and Spirit, not the speaker or hearer (Rom 10:17). (TLSB)

Here the emphasis is on the *inevitability* of the seed’s growth. The Greek word here is *automatē*, from which we get our English word *automatic*. But the automatic growth of the seed is not due to a blind and impersonal determinism. It is rather the work of God himself. Mention of “the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel” introduces the idea of gradual growth through stages. But this is a minor emphasis. The major emphasis is on the inevitability of growth. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 3)

automatē, “by itself.” The grain is produced automatically, or without a visible cause. This points to the life being present in the seed and its growth not being attributable to human effort. Man is not in control of the growth and does not bring about the harvest. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

The parable of the mustard seed (vv 30–32): Synoptic parallels can be found in Mt 13:31–32 and Lk 13:18–19. Interpreters generally emphasize the kingdom’s growth, its present hiddenness, or the assured greatness of its final state. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

1 Corinthians 3:6, 7, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”

blade...ear...full grain – This illustrates that any kind of growth including spiritual maturity goes through various stages. But this is a minor emphasis. The major emphasis is on the inevitability of growth. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 3)

"First the stalk, then the head, the finally the mature grain in the head." The point is that the plant passes imperceptibly from one stage to another in a way which causes us to marvel. Likewise with the growth which the Gospel produces. (Buls)

4:29 *he puts in the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.* A possible allusion to Joel 3:13, where harvest is a figure for the consummation of God's kingdom. (CSB)

This image is frequently used to describe judgment at the end of time (cf. Is 17:5; Rev 14:14-19). By concluding this parable with a reference to the final judgment, Jesus underscores the idea that the Kingdom is moving toward a goal. (TLSB)

This sentence is a conditional relative clause on the analogy of the present general condition. This is always what happens. The Greek-English Lexicon says: "When the condition of the crop permits." Whenever the growth, in the estimation of the one who sowed it, is mature, he harvests immediately. (Buls)

The Kingdom of God in this parable means the mysterious power of the preaching of the Gospel from the time of preaching until entry into heaven. These verses tell us that the Gospel, like seed, generates spiritual life and causes spiritual growth not only in individuals but also in groups in a way that is incomprehensible to man. This parable should cause us to preach the Gospel faithfully, without worry, and in all patience. (Buls)

4:26–29 God's kingdom grows mysteriously of itself, at its own pace, and through the power of the Word. This reality often causes frustration among those who eagerly long for a rapid expansion of the Kingdom, and all the more as we only have a short-term view of things. But God's kingdom grows according to His plan and timetable. And it is a great blessing that things ultimately depend on Him and not us, for only He is able to bring home a great harvest for life eternal. • Lord, as You have begun a good work by planting Your kingdom in our world, bring it to a full harvest in Your own good time. Amen. (TLSB)

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

30 And he said, **“With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? 31 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, 32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” 33** With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. **34** He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

4:30–34 The main point of this parable is that the kingdom of God seemingly had insignificant beginnings. It was introduced by the despised and rejected Jesus and his 12 unimpressive disciples. But a day will come when its true greatness and power will be seen by all the world. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 3)

The mustard seed is the smallest of the kinds of seeds usually planted in ancient gardens, even if there are wild plants with smaller seeds (Lenski, p. 193). While the seed is the Word of God in the other parables as well as in 1 Cor 3:6 and especially 1 Pet 1:23, since Christ is the Word incarnate, the mustard seed may be seen as Christ himself (so Trench, p. 40; Lenski, p. 193). The size of the seed has no bearing on the size of the plant that will grow from it. The tallest tree in the world, the California redwood, grows from a very small seed. The large seed of a watermelon will produce only a low vine. The Gospel of the crucified Christ is considered by the world to be foolishness and weakness, but it is the power of God for salvation (cf. 1 Cor 1:18–25). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

The tremendous growth of the church is compared with the largest of garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in shade; The rabbis sometimes understood the similar image of the growing cedar tree in Ezek 17:22–24 (v 23: “birds of every kind will nest in it”) to mean the inclusion of the Gentiles in God’s kingdom (A. M. Hunter, *Interpreting the Parables* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960] 44). The Ezekiel passage is a prophecy that the Gospel will incorporate some from all nations into Christ. We are reminded of our Lord’s prediction in Mt 24:14 and his commission in Mt 28:19. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

4:30-32 The second parable compares the smallness of the Kingdom’s origins with the largeness of the Kingdom itself. It is this contrast between the smallest and the largest that serves as the title for today’s sermon. The seemingly insignificant beginnings of the Kingdom in the seed of God’s Word will someday emerge into a great Kingdom that will be seen by all. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 3)

4:30 *kingdom of God is like* – Only record of this phrase in Mark (cf. Matt. 13:24; 18:23; 22:2; 25:1). (TLSB)

Jesus answers His own question in verse 31. (Buls)

4:31 *mustard seed* – Proverbial in rabbinical teaching for its smallness (cf. Mt. 17:20). Technically a hyperbole, since the mustard seed is not actually the smallest seed known. (TLSB)

"Plant" occurs twice, once in this verse and once in the next verse. In 31 "plant" lays stress on the time of sowing, but in 32 it lays stress on the sowing itself. (Buls)

At the time of sowing the mustard seed is the smallest seed. Jesus is speaking of seeds ordinarily planted in His day. He has been criticized because botanists know of seeds smaller than the mustard seed. Jesus is not giving a lesson in botany. He is making a point which becomes apparent in the next verse. (Buls)

Using this small seeds helps to illustrate what God can do with very little or in the case of creation, nothing. Another example of something growing to huge proportions from a very small seed is the California redwood. In the spiritual realm this points to the fact that anything is going to get done it is only by God’s power and not anything human being can do.

kokkōi sinapeōs, “mustard seed.” The mustard plant is a fitting choice for this parable due to the proverbial smallness of its seed and the great contrast to its final size. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

It also has been suggested that Jesus' choice of the mustard seed might have served to correct a common misunderstanding regarding the nature of the kingdom of God. By portraying the kingdom as a mustard plant—which typically reaches only 3–4 feet in height (though it can grow as tall as 15 feet), and which many considered a nuisance and an undesirable plant—this parable might have served as corrective to those who mistakenly believed the Church would manifest the outward might and stateliness of the cedar tree prophesied in the Old Testament Reading. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

4:32 *larger plants* – One variety of mustard (*sinapis nigra*) can reach a mature height of 10 feet, making it the largest plant in an herb garden. (TLSB)

birds – In contrast to v. 15, here the birds represent people of every nation. It alludes to a prophecy comparing the Messiah's rule to a great tree in whose shadow "birds of every sort will nest" (Ezk 17:23). (TLSB)

In verse 31 stress was laid on the size of the mustard seed at the time of planting. Verse 32 lays stress on what happens to the seed after it's been planted. (Buls)

This is what always happens, human experience corroborates it, and people easily understand it. It grows up, it becomes, it produces. (Buls)

"Garden plants" is variously translated "shrubs, plants, garden plants." Not "trees" but tree-like enough to have large branches. (Buls)

In verses 30-32 Jesus is describing the mysterious growth and spread of the Gospel from small beginnings to vast proportions, bringing blessings even to unbelievers. The church began with twelve apostles. Now there are many millions of Christians. (Buls)

4:33-34 Parables in the teaching ministry of Jesus stimulated thinking and illustrated spiritual truths. Quite often Jesus ended up explaining the parables to his own disciples. Parables illustrate that growth, including growth in understanding the Kingdom, is a gradual process rather than an instantaneous event. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 3)

Verses 33-34 are a summary statement of Jesus' constant use of parables. People like illustrations. They stick in people's minds. "By means of such parables, many of them, He customarily spoke to them." (Buls)

"Them" is all those who heard Him preach. "The word" means primarily the Gospel. Both of the parables noted here deal with spiritual growth. The Law cannot make alive or cause growth. Only the Gospel can do that. (Buls)

Christ preached no more and no less than they could hear. His hearers' benefit was His total concern. Use Him as your model. (Buls)

Jesus was practicing what He preached. He sowed the seed of the Word and explained further to His disciples so that the seed could bring forth spiritual life either in justification or sanctification. (Buls)

4:34 *He did speak to them without using a parable.* Jesus used parables to illustrate truths, stimulate thinking and awaken spiritual perception. The people in general were not ready for the

full truth of the gospel. When alone with his disciples Jesus taught more specifically, but even they usually needed to have things explained. (CSB)

Jesus did not make His teaching confusing. Rather it was the people's preconceptions that made His teaching seem hard. (TLSB)

This does not mean that Jesus taught exclusively by parables but that parables constantly were being used. This was His customary action. (Buls)

There is much comfort for us in verses 33-34. Jesus fits the preaching of the Gospel to our ability to hear it. And He is very patient in explaining what His Word means. (Buls)

Lenski limits the sower in verse 26 to Christ. This causes difficulties. He also identifies "mustard seed," in verse 36 with Christ. (Buls)

With reference to this text Kretzmann quotes a worthwhile passage from Luther concerning the fact that Mark 4:33 does not contradict Matthew 13:13-14. (Buls)

From verses 33-34 the faithful preacher can learn much as to attitude and teaching methods. (Buls)

Pertinent Parallel Passages:

- A. Is. 55:10-11 -- The Gospel is never preached in vain. God promises that it will accomplish its purpose.
- B. 1 Corinthians 3:6-7 -- We plant and water but only God can make the Word grow.
- C. Ezekiel 17:22-24 -- Perhaps Jesus had this passage in mind when He spoke Mark 4:32.
- D. Luke 8:11 -- The Gospel causes spiritual life both in justification and sanctification.
- E. James 1:18 -- The Gospel caused our conversion.
- F. 1 Peter 1:23 and 25 -- God's ever-living Word caused our conversion.
- G. James 5:7 -- Like the farmer, wait patiently for the crop.

4:30–34 Jesus' parables reassure believers that over time the kingdom of God will grow incredibly large, far beyond its unassuming beginnings. Precisely because the Kingdom grows so slowly and its Lord is so patient, believers tend to become discouraged and its enemies are emboldened. But in the end, the Kingdom alone will stand, and everything else will be overthrown. Thank God, He shelters His people of every nation in its eternal shade. • Lord, let us see both in fact and by faith that Your kingdom will someday be all in all. Keep us ever sheltered safely within its branches. Amen. (TLSB)

Jesus Calms the Storm

35 On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, **“Let us go across to the other side.”** **36** And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. **37** And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. **38** But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, **“Teacher, do you not care that we are**

perishing?” 39 And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, **“Peace! Be still!”** And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. 40 He said to them, **“Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?”** 41 And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, **“Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”**

4:35–41 Although miracles are hard for modern man to accept, the NT makes it clear that Jesus is Lord not only over his church but also over all creation. (CSB)

From a small boat Jesus had been teaching the multitude lined up on the shore (4:2). Now that evening had come He determined to cross over to the eastern shore of the lake (probably in keeping with the principle expressed in chapter 1:38, that His mission must be extended elsewhere). (Lane)

The miracle in the text is the first of three miracles (4:35–5:43) which emphasize Mark’s proposition that Jesus is the Son of God (1:1). The stilling of the storm, the cleansing of the Gerasene demoniac, and the raising of Jairus’ daughter show that Jesus is Lord over nature, evil, and death. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

4:35 THAT DAY – “On that day” when He spoke the many parables. Jesus speaks here indicating His human nature, “Let us go...” They were on the west side of the Sea of Galilee and were about to pass over to the other side. Only Mark notes that this happened when evening had come. (Buls)

It was on the evening of the day on which Christ had taught the people and His disciples in so many parables. He was probably very tired from the strain of speaking for many hours and desired a few hours of rest. (Kretzmann)

ὀψίας γενομένης, “after evening had fallen”: Evening is the time to conclude the day’s activities, but evening is also a time when divine action takes place. See 1:32. (CC)

to the other side. Jesus left the territory of Galilee to go to the region of the Gerasenes (5:1). (CSB)

He was leaving the predominantly Jewish region of Galilee for the more Gentile region. (TLSB)

The Sea of Galilee is 13 miles long, 7 miles wide, and 160 feet deep at its deepest point. (Lutheran Bible Companion – Volume 2)

He was tired, but He also knew there was someone desperately in need of His help on the other side of the lake. In the meantime there was also a lesson to be taught to His disciples. (PBC)

Jesus and his disciples crossed the sea “when evening came.” The storm took place in darkness, adding to its terror. The disciples took Jesus along in the boat “just as he was,” that is, without his making any special preparations for the trip. Considering that Jesus had been teaching all day, this phrase probably also means “tired and weary as he was.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

4:36 leaving the crowd behind – In this verse only Mark notes that they left a large crowd, that they took Him “just as He was,” and that other boats were with Him. What does “just as He

was" mean? It is similar to "tired as he was" in John 4:6. Possibly they went quickly without any sumptuous preparation. (Buls)

Though Jesus was the sinless Son of God, He took all our weaknesses and infirmities on Himself. And the disciples did not fuss over Him. (Buls)

other boats – Only Mark notes the presence of other boats, though Jesus and the Twelve were evidently all in a single boat. (TLSB)

As noted above, only Mark notes that there were other boats. What became of them? (Buls)

Ylvisaker: They who were in the other boats also noticed this and asked in surprise: 'What manner of man is this etc.' (Buls)

Fahling: But these other little ships were probably soon scattered or frightened back on account of an approaching storm. (Buls)

We do not know. (Buls)

What happened to the other boats? Perhaps they turned back as Jesus and His disciples pulled out. At any rate the Lord, who saved the disciples, would also have saved the, had they been in danger. That the Lord Jesus came to rescue of His disciples, and did not permit those in the other boats to perish, however, must not be missed by us. To expect the Lord to come through for us when we knowingly take unnecessary and uncalled for risks is not applying faith in our Lord's actions on the Sea of Galilee properly. In that case it was the Lord Himself who told His disciples, "Let us go over to the others side." It had not been their own idea, nor did they know in advance that a storm was brewing and thus deliberately took a chance. (PBC)

4:37 *A great windstorm arose.* Situated in a basin surrounded by mountains, the Sea of Galilee is particularly susceptible to sudden, violent storms. Cool air from the Mediterranean is drawn down through the narrow mountain passes and clashes with the hot, humid air lying over the lake. (CSB)

"Furious squall" or "great windstorm" is something like a hurricane squall. No wonder the waves were beating against the boat and that it was nearly swamped.

The result clause shows the dire circumstance. The boat was filling with water. The weight of 13 men in a boat which was filling with water must have been frightening.

Lailaps megalē anemou literally means "a great storm of wind." "Situated in a basin surrounded by mountains, the Sea of Galilee is particularly susceptible to sudden, violent storms. Cool air from the Mediterranean is drawn down through the narrow mountain passes and clashes with the hot, humid air lying over the lake" (*Concordia Self-Study Bible*, p. 1509). Large waves broke over the boat (*epeballen*, literally, "were throwing upon"), threatening to sink it. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

lailaps megalē anemou, "a great storm of wind." Great indeed! The waves began to fill the boat. This was not so unusual for the Sea of Galilee, because it was shallow, and wind easily stirred up huge waves. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

The storm was extraordinary, as shown by the reaction of the disciples. Experienced fishermen though they were, they could not control the boat and feared for their lives. (PBC)

The Sea of Galilee is c 700 feet below sea level. Mount Hermon, with a 9200 foot-high peak, sits only 30 miles NE. When the westerly winds come off this mountains collide with the warm air over the lake, sudden and violent storms are sometimes produced. (TLSB)

Since the wind is nearly always stronger in the afternoon than in the morning or evening, fishing was done at night. When a storm arises in the evening, it is all the more dangerous. (Lane)

4:38 *asleep on a cushion*. The picture of Jesus, exhausted and asleep on the cushion customarily kept under the coxswain's seat, is characteristic of Mark's human touch. (CSB)

Cushion" or "pillow" was something that just happened to be in the boat. The word in ancient Greek means simply a part of the boat made of wood. (Buls)

Hendriksen: The word 'sleeping' at the very end of the sentence, creates a dramatic effect, a most striking contrast. . . . neither the roaring of the wind nor the dashing and splashing of the billows nor even the rolling and pitching of the rapidly filling boat was able to awaken Him. (Buls)

Jesus truly trusted His Father. (Buls)

Amazingly, Jesus slept through the noise and commotion, resting his head on one of the rower's cushions inside the stern. Certainly this illustrates Jesus' real humanity. He was dead tired and needed to be physically roused (*egeirō*, "raised") from sleep. But was Jesus caught off guard here? Were things out of his control? Certainly not! For he was the one who directed his disciples to cross over the sea at this time. Even knowing what was coming, Jesus was able to sleep soundly because of his perfect trust in his heavenly Father's providence and care. Nevertheless, the disciples thought matters were quite out of control: literally, "Is it not a concern to you that we are perishing?" They interpreted their circumstances to mean that Jesus didn't care what happened to them. How often do we do the same! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

katheudōn, "sleeping." What a picture of complete and perfect internal calm! Oh, that we could be that way! That's the point of the whole account—that we can have that same perfect calm in Christ Jesus. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

Jesus felt comfortable enough traveling by boat to nap on the way. (TLSB)

teacher – This is the Greek *didaskalos* which corresponds to the Hebrew *rabbi*. Strangers and critics (e.g. scribes) used this term when addressing Jesus to show they did not regard Him as an authority (cf. Mt. 12:38). Jesus' disciples seldom used this term. (TLSB note on Mt. 8:19)

do you not care – Hendriksen: There is a variety in the reports concerning the cries of the fear-stricken men. Matthew has 'So they came to him and woke him up, saying Lord, save us, we're perishing;' Luke: 'Master, we're perishing;' Mark: 'Master, don't you care that we're perishing?' It is reasonable to suppose that in a situation of terrified distress this disciple would cry one thing, another something else. (Buls)

Lenski: It has a tone of reproach, but this is softened by the implication that it is unbelievable that Jesus should not care." True. "The disciples had no right to fear, even if they perished in the waves.(Buls)

Compare this with the answer of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 3:17-18: "If our God whom we serve can save us from the furnace with its flaming fire and from your hands, He will save us, King. But if He doesn't you should know, King, we won't serve your gods or worship the golden statue you set up." (Buls)

Read Psalm 46, especially verses 2 and 3: "We're not afraid even when the earth quakes, the mountains topple into the sea, even when its waters roar and foam, and the mountains shake in the middle of it." (Buls)

They feared. This is not commendable. But they sought help from the right person. That is commendable. (Buls)

But the disciples soon gave up what seemed to them an unequal struggle. They roused Him from His sleep and said to Him: Teacher, does it cause Thee no worry that we are being destroyed? They include Him in their prayer, but are chiefly concerned about their own welfare. Whether this was a cry of fear or an actual reproach, at any rate they showed little faith in crying thus. Jesus told them so even before He arose, Matt. 18:26. (Kretzmann)

ou melei, "Do you not care?" What a question to the Savior of mankind! The disciples had shallow faith that allowed great worry when trouble came. When trouble comes, our statement to Jesus is "Do you not care?" Meaning that if he cared, he'd have already done something about it. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

In their great fear they woke Christ, and their words to Him were words both of faith and rebuke. They believed He could help them, but why had He not taken a hand already? It seems to them as though He didn't care. Their faith was not thinking straight. They were not applying to their present situation all they had witnessed Him do previously. (PBC)

4:39 *rebuked the wind...peace be still*— Jesus addresses creation by speaking to the storm as if it were a person. By His authoritative word, He masters the wind and waves just as easily as illness and demons. (TLSB)

Ylvisaker: Every disturbance in the realm of nature is a result of sin and therefore displeasing to god. The revolt in nature is a result of the interrupted harmony in the domain of the spirit. A groan of pain is heard in the kingdom of creation, Romans 8:22. (Buls)

The word for "rebuked" is found in all three Synoptics. The wind was causing the disturbance of the sea. He speaks first to the wind. He is saying: "Be lastingly muzzled." (Buls)

Jesus "rebuked" (*epitimaō*, "censure, sternly warn") the wind, as if it were a living thing. This verb is used elsewhere by Mark of Jesus rebuking demons and commanding them to be silent (Mk 1:25; 3:12; 9:25) as well as for the rebuking of people by Jesus or by others. Only in one other place in Scripture is its object an inanimate thing; in Lk 4:39 Jesus rebukes a fever. Jesus also used anthropomorphic language with the sea, which is portrayed in the OT Lesson as a proud and unruly creature, bound by God. (NIV translates *thalassa*, "sea" as "waves" in vv 39, 41.) The perfect *pephimōso* (NIV: "Be still!") literally means "put the muzzle on and keep it on" (A. T.

Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 908). Jesus' words accomplish what they say: literally, "the wind grew tired." Even a weary Jesus is stronger than the mighty winds! Notice the stark contrast between the "great storm" and the "great calm" (literal translations of vv 37, 39). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

This was no scientifically explainable coincidence; this was a miracle by the only Son of God. It displays Jesus' control over nature (First Article of the Creed), but moreover, it also reflects Jesus' conquest of the demonic forces of darkness and chaos that disrupt God's creation and threaten God's people (Second Article of the Creed). "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 Jn 3:8). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

epetimēsen, "Rebuked, spoke." He spoke to the wind and sea as if they could hear. This speaks to his power over all things. Thus are "all things under his feet" (Eph 1:22). *ekopasen ho anemos*, "the wind ceased." Of course, the wind and sea listened and obeyed. He was their Creator. The Word has power that we can't even begin to comprehend. *galēnē megalē*, "a great calm." Not only did the wind and sea listen to Jesus, but he did much more. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

there was a great calm – Hendriksen: Not only the winds immediately quiet down, but so do even the waves. Generally, it is well-known, after the winds have perceptibly diminished, the billows will continue to roll for a while . . . But in this instance winds and waves synchronize in the sublime symphony of a solemn silence. (Buls)

Only Mark records Jesus' words. (Buls)

Lenski: All three synoptists record the calm, and they all use the significant "they died down" to show instant obedience to the mighty command. (Buls)

The great storm must have been awesome. Equally awesome must have been the sudden calm. (Buls)

He had compassion with their weakness. He suddenly got up, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea: Be quiet, hold your peace. And at His word the miracle was performed before their wondering eyes. The wind did not merely die down slowly, it ceased abruptly; and at once there was a great quietness, all the more noticeable after the rushing turmoil of a few minutes before. The boat was. now gently parting the mirror-like surface of the calm sea. (Kretzmann)

Christ gave them an answer that definitely showed them He was not only a man in touch with God, but Himself possessed the power of God. At creation God spoke the word, and it was so. Here Jesus Christ spoke, "Quiet! Be still!" and the wind and the waves obeyed. IN fact, the waves died down immediately, something that normally did not happened. The calm was complete. (PBC)

4:40 *why are so afraid...no faith* – Jesus censures them on two counts: Their cowardliness and their lack of faith. Both are sin. Even if Jesus had not been present they should not have been afraid. Our sympathy for the disciples shows that we are like they were but it is still sin. But Jesus did not rebuke them for their reproachful words, but rather for their lack of faith. (Buls)

Stoeckhardt notes that the mighty Persian King, Xerxes, in his arrogance had the waters of the Hellespont whipped because his ships were destroyed. But we have the King who orders the sea and it obeys. Well said. (Buls)

Jesus pinpoints the malady in the disciples. Despite his presence with them, they still were fearful (*deiloi*, “cowardly, timid”) when trouble came. When all else failed, they finally did look to Jesus for help (see Mt 8:25), but their faith was weak. They were not confident of Jesus’ care and protection. They were not sure if he was the Lord of their lives. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

Jesus had assured the Twelve not much earlier that “the secret of the kingdom” had been given to them (v. 11). However, they had yet to internalize His teaching and self-revelation. Their lack of understanding is a theme for almost all of Mark. (TLSB)

Christ’s next words forced the disciples to face their own spiritual weakness. They should have known by this time that by having Christ on board with them awake or asleep they were safe. They had called Him teach, but had not taken His teachings to heart. They learned from this experience, and we should too. The world we live in is still under the control of our Savior, its Creator. (PBC)

4:41 *they were filled with great fear – ephobēthēsan phobon megan ephobe*, “they feared a great fear.” To the core of their being they feared—fearing their presence before a force like they had not before seen, fearing this God before whom they do not deserve to stand, fearing for their eternal welfare. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

For the third time in this pericope we have the form of "great." There was a great storm, a great calm and now a great fear. (Buls)

Very likely "Who is this?" was said very softly and in a whisper. (Buls)

All they saw was a man. But what He did God alone can do. Though they had been with Him for a long time, they are deeply impressed by His person, both human and divine. In all ages the Arians deny the divinity of Jesus and the Docetists deny His humanity. Both divinity and humanity are very pronounced in this text. Always preach the God-Man who came to seek and to save that which was lost. (Buls)

Stoeckhardt: This man Jesus is the almighty God and with His human voice quiets the raging sea. Jesus is an almighty man also in His state of humiliation as He walked here on earth. Yes, while He was asleep in this frail ship with His disciples He was ruling heaven and earth, land and sea, with His strong arm even though He was concealing this divine majesty in the form of a servant. (Buls)

Luther: It also happens today that it appears as if the Lord does not see us, and had entirely forgotten about us, as He does here in the ship, and sleeps. He lets the waves overwhelm the ship, He lets the devil and the world rage against the Christians so that it appears that we will certainly sink and drown. In His own time, however, the Lord awakes and shows His might, rebukes the littleness of our faith, the fear and fright of His disciples, listens to our pitiful cries, and 'stills the noise of the people.' Ps. 65:7. (Buls)

Stoeckhardt: Finally all restlessness of our times will subside and there will be a great calm. Yes, 'We expect the fullness of joy and blessed quietness in the heavenly garden, to which our thoughts are directed.' (Buls)

Scripture pictures heaven as a sea of glass, Revelation 4:6. But in this life we can expect the sea and the waves roaring, Luke 21:25. (Buls)

From this text the early church derived the allegory of the church as a ship, storm-tossed on the sea of life. But don't allegorize the text when you preach it. Preach it just as it is. Many of your hearers are crying: "Lord I believe. Help Thou mine unbelief!" (Buls)

"They were terrified" (literally, "they feared a great fear") is probably best understood as a positive development. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov 1:7). They had that due sense of fear that comes from being in the presence of the One who possesses almighty power. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

Who is this? In view of what Jesus had just done, the only answer to this rhetorical question was: He is the very Son of God! God's presence, as well as his power, was demonstrated (see Ps 65:7; 107:25–30; Pr 30:4). Mark indicates his answer to this question in the opening line of his Gospel (1:1). By such miracles Jesus sought to establish and increase the disciples' faith in his deity.

"Who is this?" This rhetorical question implies that the disciples were beginning to recognize that Jesus was divine. "Even" suggests that previously they assumed that his power was limited. Now they were beginning to see Jesus as the Lord of creation, and perhaps also as the gracious Lord of their lives. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

Thus the question, *tis ara houtos estin*. Again, is this God? Do they now stand before the Almighty? Are they now going to die because they have seen God in their sinfulness? Though their fears are legitimate, he simply called them on their not having faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

They may have been wondering if Jesus was a miracle worker, such as Honi the Circle-Drawer and Hanina ben Dosa. They still did not understand that Jesus is more than a miracle worker; He is the Messiah and Son of God. None of them will acclaim Jesus as Messiah until 8:29. (TLSB)

As we read this account, we are particularly struck by all the details Mark gives, as compared with the other Gospels. Such details could only be supplied by an eyewitness, Mark's mentor, the Apostle Peter. (PBC)

wind and the sea obey him – The evangelist here pictures Jesus, the Lord of the universe, who commands the sea, and it gives Him unquestioning obedience. The man Jesus is the almighty God. With His human voice He restored peace in the uproar of the elements. His human nature possesses also the divine glory and majesty! Jesus is an almighty man, was an almighty man even when He was here on earth in the midst of His humiliation. From that little nutshell of a boat, even while He was asleep, He governed heaven and earth, land and sea. Only His divine majesty was covered by the form of a servant. And as He did then, so He does now: He uses His divine power, His omnipotence, in the interest, in the service of men, especially of His disciples, of His believers. That is the comfort of this story. (Kretzmann)

ho anemos kai hē thalassa hupakouei autōi, “the wind and the sea obey him.” This sign is inconsistent with the disciples’ limited view of the Christ, in that they cannot see how this could be if it were not God himself performing this. The intensity of their inner turmoil! They had not seen anything like this before. How can it be God before them? Or how can this be only a man and still do these things? (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

4:35–41 When Jesus rebukes the wind and waves, the lifeless storm shows a greater recognition of His divine power than the disciples. Similar examples still abound, as the brute forces of nature invariably obey the Lord’s commands better than people, including God’s own children, obey them. But the Lord nonetheless continues to love and care for us, despite our dullness and doubts. He not only calms all of the storms in our lives but actually does so in ways that mature our faith and lead us to trust Him more deeply. • Lord, forgive our doubts, for we sometimes take Your silence as nothing more than sleepy indifference. Remind us that You never sleep nor slumber, but always keep us under Your watchful eye. Amen. (TLSB)