

## Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: October 28<sup>th</sup>: Mark 4: 21-41: Some Notes

**Content:** Lamps under the bed; giving rather than getting; more seed sowing and reaping; small things can lead to big things; storm on the lake.

Putting four commentaries together for these notes enriches but also challenges. You pick up extra points, but you sometimes pick up conflicting points. For example, it is natural to assume that this little cluster of parables and stories is “as it was”. Matthew, however, scatters the same material in quite different contexts (and Mark’s farmer sleeping while the seed grows is his only parable not found in either Matthew or Luke). So is this simply the early writers remembering the parable but not where and when Jesus gave it, and just “sticking it into their text”? Is it Mark, the earliest Gospel writer, getting it right; and “Matthew” changing things; or was there an earlier Matthew collection of Jesus sayings that even Mark had access to? Are the Gospel writers doing their own logical positioning, seeing common ground in different parables? Aren’t we entitled, indeed required, to identify our own connections? There is a strand in these stories which is Jesus trying to re-direct the expectations of his contemporaries about what the Messiah was going to do; but we, who don’t have that issue at the front of our minds, need to say the relevance of the stories to who we are and what we do!

The seed and the tree and the small to big and the threatening sea were all familiar pictures to those who knew their “Old Testament”. The mustard seed was very small, and the mustard bush grew to about 3 metres. (Incidentally, in terms of sizes, the one First Century Galilee fishing boat recovered suggests 8 metres long, 2.35 metres wide, 1.25 metres deep, with a slightly raised area at one end. )

Just picking up one point of particular interest: the what you put in is what you get out saying. Tom Wright links this with Shakespeare’s “Measure for Measure” (not his best play!). First, if you take it literally, it is, of course, not true. The whole point of this section is that you get out far more than you put in. But, take, for example, prayer and shared worship. If you go to the morning service without preparation (and I don’t mean clothes and make up) and simply looking for what you might get out of it, both you and the rest of the congregation will lose out. There is another saying that “They pray best together who first pray apart”. The morning service is not like an entertainment you have paid to attend, and expect to get your money’s worth without any further input.

As for Christian worship, so for Christian living. “What are *they* doing about it?” is at best an incomplete question.