

**Vision: Nurtured in Word and Sacrament,  
God sends us to become a joyful sign  
of God's abundant blessing.**

**A Seed: The Joyful Sign<sup>1</sup>**  
*Introductory Study*

**Opening Prayer**

Lord let our hearts be good soil, open to the seed of your word. Open our eyes to see where you are sending us to be your embodied word planted in the soil of our world. As the seed is crushed to make our bread, so make us a blessing of life and a nourishing presence in the lives of our neighbors, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and brother. Amen.

**Discussion Questions**

*Dear Leader: invite answers from the group, not everyone needs to answer every question, but work hard to insure that everyone is invited to share something at some point. You do not need to ask every question, just enough to get some good discussion going, and get folks thinking about seeds and planting and harvesting – something Jesus' audience would have had on their mind all the time!*

1. Think of a time of planting seeds that stands out in your mind - when you planted seeds as a child and/or in your vocation as a farmer, or gardener. What feelings did you have as you planted? How did it go? Were there setbacks, frustrations? Anyone care to share what you thought of?
2. Take a seed into your hand and keep it throughout the Bible Study. What do you notice about it? How do these words apply to a seed?

*Inert/Dead - Alive*

*Incomplete - Complete*

*Vulnerable - Tough*

*Improbable/Doubtful – Potential*

*Hopeless - Hopeful*

*Weak - Strong*

3. How is it that these totally opposite words can apply to the same thing?
4. Do some of these same opposites apply to you? Your congregation? How so?

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*This introductory session takes longer than the remaining three sessions. Please plan accordingly.*

*For this first session, each participant should be provided with a seed. When choosing seeds, pick one that is significant enough in size to be studied and reflected upon.*

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<sup>1</sup> An expanded version of this study for use as a full planning retreat or for a four-session planning series among leadership is available on the synod website (sdsynod.org) in the missional toolbox.



**Focus Text:** Mark 4:26-29

[Jesus] also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. <sup>27</sup> Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. <sup>28</sup> All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. <sup>29</sup> As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

**READ ALOUD**

Have you ever wondered, “Why is it that some people hear the word of God and believe while others hear the same word and do not believe?” Or perhaps you have asked, “How is it that ANYONE comes to believe such an outrageous story!?” Maybe you have wondered, “What is my role in this unfolding drama of people coming to faith in Jesus Christ?” “What is God doing in my church and my community to bring people to faith in Jesus?”

This parable is a way of answering these questions, by opening the eyes of Jesus’ disciples to see the mystery of God’s growing and often hidden reign.

1. Tell us about a tree or plant you have seen growing in an unlikely place or against all odds.
2. How do you think people come to believe and trust in Jesus?

**Engaging the Text**

Read Mark 1:1 *The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

1. Mark has committed a grammatical error. Do you see it?
2. In what ways does this sentence fragment contain the “DNA” of this story?
3. Consider the seed in your hand. How is this way of beginning a story similar to the way a plant begins from a seed?

The Gospel according to St. Mark begins with this fragment of a sentence – “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” It is incomplete (like a seed), but (like a seed) it contains everything we need to know about Jesus: “Jesus is the Messiah; he is God’s Son; this is good news!” That’s the “DNA” of this story. It is unlikely that Mark would accidentally start with an incomplete sentence. In literature there is a name for an incomplete sentence at the beginning of a story that contains much of what you need to know: it is called the “title.” If this is the title of Mark’s gospel, then that is significant, because it means that Mark’s whole gospel is intentionally incomplete. It is not the whole story; it is only “*the beginning of the story.*” Consider the possibility that YOU are the rest of the story!

It is no coincidence that this story, which begins with an incomplete sentence, also ends with an incomplete sentence. The literal translation of Mark 16:8 is: “*And they went out quickly from the place, because fear and great wonder had come on them: and they said nothing to anyone, because they were full of fear that...*” Bible scholars agree that this verse is the original ending of Mark’s gospel. Mark has

committed another grammatical error. Mark stopped writing (mid-sentence!), because the story isn't finished. It's still going. 2000 years later the seed is still being scattered, and it is still growing, "we know not how."

***At the end of Mark's Gospel a question hangs in the air – "how will it be possible for anyone to hear the good news and come to believe when Jesus' disciples are all hiding in fear?"***

And the answer is in our seed parables: "Someone scatters seed on the ground. <sup>27</sup> Night and day, whether she sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though she does not know how." The disciples are the seeds carrying the DNA of this good news. They have been cast into the soil of the world, and like those seeds they are weak, hopeless, doubtful and incomplete, but like our seeds, with the word that is planted in them, they are also strong, hopeful, and full of potential. Make no mistake, the seed will sprout and grow, it will produce a harvest! God's reign comes!

**...YOU are the seed.**

Of course, Jesus teaches that **the Word of God is the seed**. However, it is also clear that in Mark's gospel this Word is never un-incarnate – the Word always takes on flesh – it always has a human delivery vehicle! So in a sense, we, as bearers of the word, are the seed – or at least the husk of the seed!

**Applying the Text to the Vision – "A Joyful sign of God's abundant blessing"**

God has gifted you and placed you in your community for a purpose: to be a joyful sign of God's abundant blessing. In your community, you are the seed bearing human agents of the healing, life giving, soul convicting and saving Word of God!

**You are God's seeds of the Kingdom – explore together the question, "What is unique about you?"**

Explore together the following ways in which you are unique as God's seeds of the kingdom. As a group, call out and list as many as you can in 10 minutes or less. Put the list in a place where all can see.

- What passions and hopes?
- What talents?
- What significant relationships with individuals or organizations in the community?
- What physical assets?

***Consider conducting an "Asset Mapping" exercise for a deeper exploration of your giftedness – check out the online missional toolbox on the SD Synod Website for a guide on conducting an asset mapping exercise.***

## **Respond and Celebrate**

Explore together where your unique gifts and passions align with what you know about the hopes and hurts of your community. On a piece of newsprint (chalkboard, whiteboard, smart board, overhead projector, computer projector... you get the point) put up all of the gifts and assets you've identified on one side. On the other side name a few of the real hopes and hurts of your community. Now connect the dots – Where or in what situation in your town, city or open country congregation is God calling you to be “planted” next?” How might God be calling you to be the joyful sign of God’s abounding blessing in a new way?

**Closing Song**            You are the Seed (WOV #753)

## **Closing Prayer**

Keep, O Lord, your household the church in our steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> From the Book of Common Prayer, contemporary Collect for the Season after Pentecost, Proper 6.