

Mark 4:26-34            The Old Times  
2 Corinthians 5:6-17  
June 13, 2021

A week ago I installed a ceiling fan in my bedroom to keep the room cooler in the summer months. Intellectually speaking, it was a somewhat easy procedure; connect the white wires to the white, black to the black, ground to the ground, mount the fixture.

Physically it was a little more demanding. The first task was to remove the existing light fixture and prepare for a much heavier fan. The fan motor hung from a hook so that the electrical connections could be made, and the mount secured. After that the fan arms and blades were attached, then the light itself, everything tightened down. Finally the light bulbs and the bowl with the pull chains.

Each task required climbing up and working with my hands above my head. Going up and coming down became tiring after awhile. By the time I finished I was exhausted. All this was done with the power turned off at the breaker to avoid being electrocuted and as the afternoon progressed the light from the sun diminished.

At last, upon completion, I flipped the breaker back into the “on” position . . . and nothing happened. Neither the fan nor the light worked. I didn’t think it was a defective fixture, but that I had installed it incorrectly, and would have to take it down and start over. Since it was dark I decided to wait for the next

day, I would have to live one more night without a ceiling fan. I went into the other room to watch TV or read a book or something.

Later, when it was completely dark, I had a reason to enter the bedroom and because it was dark, I instinctively reached for the switch on the wall and turned it on. At once, both the fan and the light came to life and instantly I realized that I had left the wall switch off. It worked after all. I laughed at my forgetfulness.

All this effort is just to say this; that not one single aspect of installing the fan, or the house in which it was installed or the electric infrastructure or the fan itself, happened naturally. Someone had to do it all.

The parables of the day are quite the opposite, for they call attention to that aspect of human life which happens independently of all human effort, mental or physical. The seed is scattered and nature goes to work.

“Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows though he does not know how (I think that even though we know more about the how of things nowadays, there is still a mysterious quality to nature), all by itself the soil produces grain, first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe (which means, when nature’s part is done) he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.

Jesus says the Kingdom of God is like this. He then goes on to the parable of the Mustard Seed which expands the theme, because it speaks of the world of creation, full of life without help from human beings.

There is an interesting combination of human effort, and natural process, . . . that feeds us. As far as day-to-day life is concerned, all of life is governed by these two sources of energy; nature, creation, God's part, the electrons, on the one hand, and on the other, human beings doing things, figuring things out, getting up and working.

There is an irony in Christian theology that is worth spending some time thinking about. We are taught and so believe that we are entirely dependent upon God for our lives and well-being. This seems indisputable. Yet we must also be active, creative, ingenious even, industrious, or it all comes to naught.

These parables are obviously for those people who spend all their time doing, going, going, doing, who have come to overestimate their achievements. They encourage the acknowledgment that without the life of God, we have nothing at all, and to see that not only is life a gift, but an amazingly wonderful one at that. Take some time on this holy day and think about it.

Before I wind things up I hope to make a suggestion about how we interpret the Bible, about the context in which we interpret it. Benjamin Franklin did not invent electricity. He *discovered* it, it was there all along, a part of the created order. Yet the world was changed

by his discovery in ways he could not imagine. The value of human work was enhanced by it.

The suggestion is this; the entire bible was written before the discovery of electricity, which enhanced the value of human work, and for that matter, before all the modern discoveries that have increased the importance of work.

And each of us has been born after such technological advancements, and have read the bible entirely after these world-changing discoveries. This suggestion has grand implications for the way we interpret the bible.

It is all the more important to remember our dependance upon nature, which is a gift from God. We live in new times, and it does not serve us to strive for a return to the old times. In spite of all our work, we are still dependent on natural processes for our survival, the fan won't work without the electricity, and upon God's grace for our well-being.

Let this acknowledgement produce in us first gratitude, and humility, repentant obedience and then compassion; unselfish love and good deeds. And let all the actions of our lives produce in us meaning beyond meaning, peace beyond understanding, radiant joy, and an inextinguishable hope, let this be our prayer, to the praise of God's glorious grace.

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