

**Reflection on Mark 4:2–9, 26–34**  
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One of the earliest Eucharistic prayers of the church went like this:

*As grain has been gathered from many fields into one loaf and grapes from many hills into one cup, grant, O Lord, that your whole church may soon be gathered from the ends of the earth into your kingdom. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*

It wasn't spoken in English, of course, but this prayer and the yearning within it have been carried across two centuries by the Church. In fact, this prayer makes up part of the required liturgy in the denomination in which I was ordained. So like many around the world, I said it every time we gathered for communion.

Much in this image of grain and grapes is symbolic of the Christian life itself. For in the image, we see that faith is not staid and static in nature. Like the elements of communion, the Christian life and Body of Christ of which we are a part are organic and (hopefully) always growing and changing.

We are an incarnational people, birthed from and worshipping an incarnational—that is, en-fleshed—God. Our faith and community arise from and are sustained by the stuff of earth, and like all fleshy, earthy things, are shaped by cycles of birth, decay, rebirth and transfiguration.

Welcoming, or even allowing this organic nature to live and breathe can be confronting at times. As we continue to move through the global pandemic that has defined our existence as of late, we are well aware, I think, of some of the difficulties.

We long for regularity and predictability, for routine and some givenness. It occurs to me the overnight near-celebrity status of chief medical officers and epidemiologists reveals something of this desire. They appear on our screens and we hope for some sure-fire answers that will anchor us and alleviate the pain of unknowing, risk and constant state of flux. But those who are paying attention have come to realise that, as definitive as these experts may sound, the virus itself is organic, and so, the information and so-called answers keep changing.

The same is true for faith and community. There are no certitudes to be had in an enlivened spiritual life, no once-and-for-all answers or ways of being in Christian community. Even as the pandemic highlights the challenges of this organic quality, hopefully we've discovered something of the gifts as well.

Indian author Arundhati Roy, best known for her Man Booker Prize winning novel *The God of Small Things*, sets before us this encouragement:

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.

We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice, hatred, our avarice, and data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world.

In other words, when we allow our faith and community to live and breathe, to be organic, responsive and alive, we create openness and opportunity for change *for the good*. Behold, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.

This is the invitation before us as we travel through the pandemic. We can cling tightly to life as it once was, hoping against hope that something of this existence will remain intact and that we will be able to reassemble things as they were. Or we can allow this season—as trying as it is—to have its way in us.

For the next five weeks, we will explore in worship our experience of the pandemic. What are the losses that need attending and what would we like to nurture into fulness? What is being revealed and how are we being shaped, as individuals and as a church? And perhaps most importantly, how is God trying to form us into a new creation?

As today's parables reveal, the Gospel of love is generously, haphazardly even, cast upon our hearts, daily and in a variety of ways like scattered seeds. Sometimes we are able to recognise and receive this love for what it is and it takes root and grows within us. It is on these seedlings—the love and life that are beginning to sprout—that our reflection will focus in these weeks.

I'm aware from my own experience that some of us may feel ambivalent or even resistant to spending any more time thinking about COVID-19 than we have to! We may feel fatigued and quite done with it, ready to see the backside of this unseen invasion that is upending so much.

And yet, while the experience is still fresh in our minds and as we seek wisdom for the path ahead, the time seems ripe for us to have this conversation—with God and with each other. Who knows, we may be like the farmer in the parable who discovers something new has grown overnight and marvels at how such a wonder has come to be!

And we will make our start here, at this table at which we are fed with elements that like our lives arise from the good earth. May this bread and this cup fill us with grace and courage for the journey ahead.