Don't Mistake Slow for Absent

Genesis 25:19–34 • Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23

Have you ever noticed that the deepest things God does in us rarely happen quickly?

Healing.

Trust.

Forgiveness.

Love.

A friendship.

A marriage.

A life with Jesus Christ.

None of them can be rushed.

Yet most of us spend a surprising amount of our lives wishing they could.

We stand in front of the microwave wondering why it's taking so long. We refresh the tracking number before the package could possibly arrive. We plant flowers on Saturday and look for blooms on Sunday. And if we're honest, we pray on Monday and by Wednesday we quietly begin wondering if anything is happening.

We don't mind waiting. We just don't want to wait very long. I don't think it's an accident that the lectionary gives us these two stories together. Genesis tells us about a man who couldn't wait. Jesus tells us about a Sower who could.

So let me ask you a question.

What happens when we can't wait?

Genesis tells us Esau came home exhausted.

Not evil.

Not rebellious.

Just tired.

Hungry.

Human.

Jacob happened to be cooking. The smell of fresh stew filled the air. And in one impulsive moment Esau traded something priceless for something immediate. I've always felt a little sorry for Esau. Mostly because I think I understand him. Don't you? We've all had moments when today's hunger became louder than tomorrow's promise.

Maybe it wasn't food.

Maybe it was fear.

Maybe it was loneliness.

Maybe it was the desperate need to control something we simply could not control.

We've all reached for immediate relief only to discover later what it cost us.

Everyone standing in that tent saw a hungry man eating lunch. But God saw something deeper. God saw a heart beginning to confuse urgency with trust. And I wonder how often that happens in our own lives.

Not because we're trying to run away from God.

Because we're tired.

Because we're grieving.

Because we're afraid.

Because we've been carrying something for so long we simply don't know how much longer we can carry it.

Some of you walked into worship this morning feeling more like Esau than you'd like to admit. You're weary. You've made decisions simply because you didn't know how much longer you could keep carrying what you've been carrying. If that's you, this story isn't against you. It's for you. Because Scripture isn't filled with perfect people. It's filled with people who discover that Jesus Christ remains faithful even when they are not.

Now hold Esau in your mind.

Don't let him go just yet.

Because Jesus invites us somewhere else. Not into a kitchen. Into a field.

Can you see it?

Morning has broken. A Sower walks slowly across the field. A weathered bag hangs from His shoulder. He reaches inside. Takes a handful of seed. And scatters it. Some falls on the path. Some lands among rocks. Some disappears into thorns. Some settles into good soil. Everybody watching saw dirt.

Jesus saw the Kingdom.

That one sentence changed the way I read this parable. The Kingdom isn't something we imagine. It is God's reign breaking into ordinary life through Jesus Christ. Jesus teaches us to notice it. Can I confess something? I've preached this parable many times. I've read the commentaries. I've studied the different kinds of soil. But only recently did I realize I had been asking the wrong question.

For years I kept asking, *"What kind of soil am I?"* But Jesus kept inviting me to ask, "Who is this Sower?"

That changed everything.

Because once I began looking at the Sower instead of myself, I started seeing the heart of God in a way I never had before. Jesus keeps seeing what everyone else overlooks. He looks at birds and sees freedom from anxiety. He looks at lilies and sees trust. He looks at children and sees greatness. He looks at fishermen and sees apostles. He looks at a Sower and sees the Kingdom of God.

Perhaps that's what discipleship really is. Not simply learning more about Jesus Christ. But learning to see the world through His eyes. So, before we go any farther this morning, I want to offer one simple prayer. **Jesus... teach us to see what You see.** Most people probably watched that Sower for only a few moments.

After all, there wasn't much to see. A man. A field. A bag of seed. It looked like another ordinary morning. But Jesus says, **"Stay there." "Look again."** The Sower reaches into the bag. Another handful. Another step. Another handful. Another step. Never seeming anxious. Never seeming hurried. Never seeming discouraged. He simply keeps sowing. Now that we've begun asking a different question, let's stay with it.

Who is this Sower?

The Sower never changes. The seed never changes. Only the condition of the soil changes. I wonder if, before Jesus wants us to think about ourselves, He first wants us to know the heart of God. Some seed falls on the path. The birds come almost immediately. The Sower keeps walking. Some falls where the soil is thin. The sun rises. The plants wither. The Sower keeps walking. Some falls among thorns. The weeds choke it. The Sower keeps walking. Another handful. Another step. Another handful. Another step.

If I were that Sower, I'd become careful. Selective. I'd stop wasting seed. Wouldn't you? But Jesus doesn't describe a careful Sower. He describes a generous one. One whose hope is greater than disappointment. One whose faithfulness is greater than failure. One who refuses to let yesterday's disappointments determine today's generosity.

That isn't simply a picture of a farmer. It's a window into the heart of God revealed in Jesus Christ. When Kimberly and I first moved to southern Arizona, I looked across the desert and quietly wondered, "How does anything grow out here?" Someone smiled, pointed to a mesquite tree, and said, "That tree has spent years growing roots before most people ever notice much happening above the ground." The desert doesn't hurry. Neither does God. We live in a culture that mistakes speed for faithfulness. But the Kingdom has never grown that way. No one plants a seed on Monday, digs it up on Tuesday, and says, "Why aren't you growing?" If you keep pulling up the roots, you'll never let the plant live.

I wonder how often we do that.

We pray... then start digging. We forgive... then start digging. We trust... then start digging. We keep asking, "Is anything happening?" Jesus quietly points back to the field. **"Look again."** The Sower keeps sowing because grace is still at work even when no one else can see it. Imagine if we measured faithfulness the way Jesus does.

Not by speed. Not by size. But by patience. By quiet love. By people who keep praying. Keep serving. Keep forgiving. Keep showing up. Because they trust the Sower. Perhaps Jesus has been growing something here... longer than we've realized. There is one more thing I want you to notice.

Jesus never tells us what happened to that field a year later. He never tells us whether the hard path finally softened. He never tells us whether someone pulled the thorns. He never tells us whether the rocky ground became deep enough for roots. Instead... He leaves us watching the Sower. The Sower keeps walking. The Sower keeps scattering. The Sower never seems to lose hope.

I think that's because before Jesus wants us to think about ourselves, He wants us to know the heart of God.

God has never loved you because you finally got everything right. God has never remained faithful because your faith never faltered. God has never said, "Come back when you're ready." No.

In Jesus Christ, God crossed every distance to come to you. That is the gospel. Before you ever reached for God... God had already reached for you. Before you recognized the Kingdom... Jesus had already been sowing the seeds of God's Kingdom in your life. Before you ever noticed the first signs of growth... Christ was already at work beneath the surface.

That changes the way we see everything. The Kingdom isn't something we imagine. It is God's reign breaking into ordinary life through Jesus Christ. Jesus teaches us to notice it.

So, this week... don't spend your days looking for something spectacular. Spend your days paying attention. Look for one seed. One quiet act of faithfulness. One place where Jesus Christ has already been at work. Tomorrow morning, before the news... before the errands... before the worries of the day... pray one simple prayer: **Jesus... teach me to see what You see.**

Then go through your day with your eyes open. Look at the sunrise over the Santa Rita Mountains. Some mornings they'll seem close enough to touch. Other mornings they'll disappear behind the monsoon clouds. The mountains haven't moved. Only your ability to see them has.

Perhaps the presence of Christ is often like that. Not absent. Simply waiting for us to notice. Watch for the quiet kindness no one applauds. The patient faithfulness no one celebrates. The ordinary places where the extraordinary grace of Jesus Christ is quietly taking root. You don't have to manufacture the Kingdom. You don't have to make Jesus present. You are simply learning to recognize where Jesus has already been sowing.

Friends...

my task has never been to convince you that Jesus Christ is present. My task is to help you recognize where Jesus Christ has already been at work. Because if we learn to see where Jesus has already been sowing... we'll begin to discover that He has been much nearer than we ever imagined. So don't mistake slow... for absent. Don't mistake hidden... for hopeless. Because the Kingdom often grows quietly... before anyone notices. And the good news... the very good news... is this: The miracle... is not that you finally found Jesus. The miracle... is that **Jesus never stopped sowing the seeds of God's Kingdom until you finally recognized what He had been doing all along.**

May that become the way you walk through this week. May Christ give you new eyes to see His Kingdom... new ears to hear His voice... and a new heart to trust His patient grace. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.