

Title: ENCOUNTERING THE MYSTERY OF THE KINGDOM

Text: Mark 4:1-20

Jesus tells a story

The story doesn't make sense

Jesus explains the story

Are you listening?

Hearing the Word

Accepting the Word

Bearing Fruit

CONVERSATION STARTER

- Whom do you know that is a really good listener? What makes them a good listener? Do you think there is a distinction between hearing and listening? Why or why not?
- Read Mark 4:1-20. Why do you think Jesus uses the metaphor of farming to teach the crowd? What might Jesus mean when he says, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear"? Why do you think Jesus includes the quotation He does in verse 12 to explain His use of parables? What similarities exist between the three soils that do not bear fruit? What are some differences? What reason does Jesus give for why the good soil produces the crop? Why do you think Jesus lists these reasons?
- Read the excerpt below. How does MacDonald connect obedience and growing in faith? Why does MacDonald emphasize obedience because Jesus said to do certain things? Of the short list of ideas MacDonald provides for obeying Jesus, which ones do you find difficult? Why?
- How might we develop "ears to hear" Jesus' kingdom announcement? Which of the pitfalls do you most readily identify with in the description of the soils? How do we recognize the fruit of the kingdom in our lives? What areas of your life is the parable of the soils calling you to address?

EXCERPT FROM: *Knowing the Heart of God*

BY: George MacDonald

Do you find it hard to trust him (God)? Hard it will remain, while the things he tells you to do, things you can do, you will not try...True faith, true belief, is not possible where there is not a daily doing of the things he says. They are what make faith take root and spring to life...Neglecting the things he says, there is no soil in which your faith can grow.

Thus again comes the question: what have you done this day because it was the will of Christ? What have I done? Obedience comes when, as a conscious act, we lay aside the appetite, the desire, the inclination of our flesh, our self, the tendency in which our human soul would go if left to itself, and instead do what he tells us, subduing our own will, mastering it, subjugating it, and bringing it into submission to his.

...Have you shown consideration, done good, returned kindness for a wrong done you, extended patience, been a servant, rejoiced in adversity, taken the role of humility before others, prayed for someone you don't like, trusted God to supply a pressing need? Have you done any of these things, suppressing your natural tendency to the contrary, and done them with rejoicing because Jesus said to do them?

Tell me something that you have done, are doing, or are trying to do because he told you. If you cannot, it is no wonder you have difficulty trusting him.