

The wild kingdom (11B) (Mark 4:26-34)

When predictable things are replaced by elusive ones

by [Matthew Johnson](#)

June 11, 2021

To receive these posts by email each Monday, [sign up](#).

For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.

The windows of my church office open up to a sea of asphalt, separated from a busy highway by an isthmus of well-manicured turf. From my desk there, I can mark time based on what is visible.

Based on the number of children sleepily arriving at the preschool in the morning, the same kids skipping out to their rides in the afternoon, or the speed of westbound traffic in the evening, I can tell you the approximate hour. If you want to know the day of the week, that is just as easy; I only need to check and see which set of joint-custody parents are parked at the far end of the lot to pick up or drop off their kids. There is a wildcard: a large man, often in a tank top, who slowly navigates his motorcycle around parking medians as if he is practicing for his driving exam. He doesn't seem to have a pattern.

Well, I should say, "didn't." I haven't sat at that desk much recently. The routine those windows once presented is now something of a mystery.

When the COVID-19 pandemic forced a substantial portion of my workload to shift from producing in-building worship to a variety of digital connections, I found myself looking out a new set of windows. I now compile collections of things in editing software at a makeshift desk in my living room. Looking out upon a rocky thicket of brambles, this new window doesn't present nearly the same level of consistency

that the church ones did. I have no way to tell you the day or hour, for everything is wild here—wilder, even, than the man on the motorbike. A fox runs by whenever she has somewhere to be. Racoons will occasionally come around in the evening. Once there were even some turkeys. The only constant, it seems, is a patch of moss that has been slowly creeping across the grass in the shadow of an old tree.

The predictable things I could once see have been replaced by more elusive ones. The routines I could count on have been exchanged for things I don't entirely understand.

In his parables, Jesus seems to be suggesting that this is the kind of space where the kingdom of God exists—the plant that was suddenly there, the miniscule that mysteriously transforms into the massive. This was much easier to accept (or maybe deny) when I could move more freely between the consistent and the wild. Back then, I saw the kingdom as a fuzzy place and a timeless escape. Now it is much more real, and I'm hoping I can grow more comfortable with it.