

Beyond the Obvious

"The earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head." Mark 4:28

Things are sometimes more than they appear, and they tell us more than what is obvious. A caterpillar is not a worm but an immature butterfly. A tadpole is not a fish but an immature frog. And an acorn is not just a nut but an immature oak tree. Both the caterpillar

and tadpole are active stages of life. But the acorn is altogether different because it is a seed—a dormant stage of life. To hold a seed in your

hand is to hold the future. That much is obvious. But what can a seed tell us that is not obvious?

Seeds are not yet what they will be. An acorn is genetically an oak tree but only a fraction of the size and mass of the mature tree. Like all seeds, the job of the acorn is simply to survive. But to do that, a seed must be dry. And dry means metabolically inactive. Seeds kept dry can harbor life for years, waiting for

the right conditions of temperature and moisture to encourage germination. Seeds stored in the tombs of Egyptian pharaohs for thousands of years were eagerly tested to see if they would germinate. Alas, the seeds were too dry and the life within had expired. Seeds need at least 10% moisture to maintain the enzymes which repair DNA at the start of germination. Without these critical enzymes, the seed dies.

Annual grasses must produce seeds each year or the link to the future is broken. In the case of grasses like wheat or barley, a single plant produces dozens and dozens of seeds, dramatically illustrating another function of seeds: the multiplication of life. A single corn plant might produce a handful of ears but each ear contains hundreds of individual corn seeds. There is truly a sense in which the seed form may die by germination but, in doing so, brings forth an abundance of fruit.

Cotton-covered seeds, like those of the cottonwood tree, are sometimes blown by the wind hundreds—or even thousands—of miles, spreading new life where they land. Cocklebur seeds hook onto the hair of animals, traveling until they drop off and start the cycle again. And, of course, the seeds within fruit go with the animals that consume them until they are deposited—sometimes far from the original plant's location.

A seed is an ark of life which, while

dormant, can resist heat, cold, and dryness that would wither an active plant. And seeds provide many unique ways for life to spread since the plant itself is tied to one spot. But what do seeds tell us? They tell us that life was meant to survive. That life was meant to multiply and flourish. And that life was meant to move and fill the earth. It seems that if we would listen to what even a single seed is telling us, we could still hear the echo of God's original design for life to multiply and fill the earth.

"Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth'" (Gen. 1:28).

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