

Sermon – Trinity 2, Sunday 13 June 2021 All Saints & BCP

Mark 4:26-34

Sowing seeds of faith



My wife recently planted out sweet pea seedlings in pots. Then came the high winds and heavy rains of a few weeks ago! Planting seeds in the garden makes you realise how much we're at the

mercy of the weather, the appetite of pests, as well as the ongoing maintenance required. It seems to me that a garden is an investment of three things: time, patience, and careful endeavour. It's a bit like that with sharing our faith. We hope and pray the words we share will be meaningful, but do not know for certain. In today's Bible reading, we see an example of what happened when two different people heard the same words of Jesus, but it spoke to them in different ways. Our reading is from the Gospel of Mark, and is part of a short collection of sayings by Jesus about God's kingdom. Jesus talked to his followers in parables, illustrations of divine truth that spark reflection and inquiry. Just like looking at one face of a precious stone, parables offer insight but always do not reveal the full picture. Jesus once said *'those who have ears, let them hear'* (Matt 11:15), meaning that those who are prepared to consider and open their hearts to his words, will find truth revealed to them. Jesus also tailored his words to his hearers. To lawyers he spoke in terms of the law; Pharisees he engaged

in discourse about right and wrong; to those in positions of power, he talked about being first and last; to those with wealth he spoke about using the talents we have for God's purposes. To village communities, familiar with sowing and harvesting throughout the seasons of the year, he spoke often in agricultural metaphor, like our reading today, where he talks about God's kingdom as a small seed. Like talking to a modern day teenager in terms of Netflix and TikTok, or an elderly person in terms of Carrie Grant films, Jesus made sure he was on their wavelength. This is firstly a reminder to us that as Christians we are called to speak the language of those around us, but to be *'in the world but not of the world'* (John 17), meaning we are not to espouse worldly values like avarice, pride and selfishness, but nevertheless walk alongside those around us and bring the love of Christ into the heart of our community, through word and deed. So how did Jesus words speak differently to two worldly people? Scholars tell us that Mark's gospel is the probable source for much of the material in Matthew and Luke's gospels. However, Matthew and Luke record Jesus' sayings about the kingdom of God with subtly differing emphasis, because the word spoke personally to them. This is good, not just because it demonstrates these are individual and personal accounts, but also because it offers insight into how Jesus words spoke directly into the experience of two people in different ways. Jesus' words moved these men to a position of acceptance of faith, which encourages us because we know by his Holy Spirit, He speaks to people through us. Luke records the aspect of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom like a mustard tree, which *'is the smallest of all the seeds yet when it grows up*

it become the greatest of shrubs, putting forth large branches so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade' (v32 c/w Luke 13:19). Luke was a gentile physician who later wrote his gospel to a gentile convert, called Theophilus (See Luke 1:1). To Luke and the gentile recipients of his gospel (and sequel, the book of Acts), he is emphasising the inclusivity of the Kingdom. As birds flying long distance find rest and shade in a tall tree, so Luke and other gentile believers can find ourselves welcomed by Jesus Christ as part of God's family. St Paul wrote to the Galatians *'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus'* (Gal 3:28), it is this Gospel of inclusivity and acceptance through God's grace that Dr Luke felt compelled to share with others, and we see reflected in his gospel. Jesus words also had significance for their Jewish hearers however, for Jesus' illustration of a tree recalls Old Testament imagery. Daniel, a prophet of the Old Testament, wrote about a vision he had: *'I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. ¹¹ The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth.¹² Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.'* Jesus is therefore prompting his Jewish hearers to have the ears to hear that God always intended his kingdom for all people, not just Jews. In Matthew's gospel however, the emphasis is on the size of mustard seed as opposed to the tree: *'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows,*

it is the largest of garden plants...'(Matt 13:32). Why? Perhaps because of the humility and potential a tiny mustard seed speaks of. The seed looks non-descript and it is hard to believe something landscape-changing could come of it! Was Matthew reminded through Jesus words that he had found new life in unexpected and humble places? A wealthy tax collector, and a Jewish collaborator with the Romans, he had built his life around accumulating wealth. But when he met Jesus, he realised he'd been misled by his own avarice. Instead of judgement, there is forgiveness and acceptance, and faith grows like a tiny mustard seed sown from which a good harvest is reaped. Despite the financial wrongs Matthew committed and the selfishness focus of his life, he found unmerited favour and forgiveness through the redeeming love of Jesus Christ.



Maybe someone you know needs to hear about the good news of the kingdom today? May I encourage you to pray for an opportunity to share the good news of Christ's love with those around you, sowing seeds of faith by word and deed. Just like a garden, with time, patience and careful endeavour, trust the Lord to bring the increase in faith like shoots from the smallest of seeds. Amen.