

Mark 4 v 26-34; 2 Corinthians 5 v 6-10, 14-17
Second Sunday after Trinity, 13 June 2021

First from the epistle Paul says, “For anyone united to Christ there is a new creation: the old order has gone, a new order has already begun.” Our unity with Christ dawns bit by bit. When we pray at first it seems all our own doing, but actually it is the activity of another. It is the experience of being prayed in, graciously caught up in, a divine conversation so that as we pray we begin to glimpse the new creation.

God’s new creation is a commitment to a mutual relationship. God surrenders his unilateral sovereignty for the future “new order” which “has already begun”. It is God who unites us to himself; who expresses himself in the spontaneous, uncompelled outflowing of love to his people. It is his pure will that, at whatever cost to himself, is there because our God fulfils his divinity in inexhaustible self-giving. In the gospel Jesus describes the kingdom of God as a farmer who goes out to sow his seed.

The seed is sown. The farmer continues his normal activities and does nothing to it until the moment comes to harvest. And the harvest is the biblical symbol of the coming of judgment and the kingdom. The kingdom ushers in the reign of God. It means the day when God’s will, will be done as perfectly on earth, as it is in heaven. That is the goal of God for the whole universe. The farmer himself does not make the seed grow. He does not even understand how it grows. It has the secret of life and of growth within itself.

No one has ever possessed the secret of life. We can disorder things, as Barclay points out, rearrange them, develop them, but create them we cannot. The kingdom is God’s. We can frustrate or hinder it or we can give it opportunity to come more fully or more speedily. The farmer remains unshaken in his belief that a rich harvest will reward his labour. He is inactive after the sowing. His life follows its ordered round of waking or sleeping night and day. The seed grows from stalk to ear, to ripened corn the unceasing process of growth. Then suddenly the moment arrives which rewards the patient waiting. The corn is ripe, the sickle is thrust in and the joyful cry rings out, the harvest has come to bring in the kingdom. So God acts almost imperceptibly bringing in the reign of God.

The second parable is of the mustard seed. The mustard seed was the smallest seed in the ground and by comparison, the plant which grew from it was prodigious. So a grain of mustard seed stood for the smallest thing in Palestine. But amazingly this mustard seed grew into something as big as a tree in which birds could make their nests. So never be disappointed by small beginnings.

It may seem that at the moment our faith produces a very small effect. But that small effect if repeated, if trusted, will become great. We must never lose heart. Everything must have a beginning. The church which began in Palestine, small as the mustard seed, has now room in it for every nation of the world. Jesus knows that God has made a beginning, bringing with it a harvest reward beyond all asking or conceiving. In spite of failure and opposition, from hopeless beginnings God brings forth the triumphant end which he has promised.

Jesus often uses illustrations from nature to describe the coming of the kingdom of God. Nature’s growth is constant. Night and day while we sleep or are unaware, the growth goes on. Human effort and human goodness are spasmodic. But not so with God. The work of God goes on, quietly, unceasingly as God unfolds his plan. Nature’s growth is powerful. A tree can split a concrete pavement with the power of its growth. A weed can push its green head through an asphalt path. God’s work then goes on and nothing in the end can stop the purpose of God. Growth shows us there will be a consummation. There will be a day when the harvest comes. We have to wait with patience and expectation. We are creatures of the moment and think that way, but we need to learn to wait on God. He summons us to, prepare.

When the consummation comes, which it will, we must be ready for it. As Christians we become citizens of a bigger country whose boundaries are endless, stretching out to the realms of space, reaching into the tiniest form of being, like the mustard seed, living on land or in the sea. This becoming, this growth, evolves from within, from realising the common bond of the one universal family, the breath, energy and life common to all growth and to all creation. It requires a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness.

This view from within says Pope Frances, “entails a deep sense of thanksgiving, in recognition of our responsibility for the earth, that all is gift, inspiring us to give ourselves in turn, in service of our Mother earth and of all creation.” Meister Eckhart points out that “everything in the heavens, on the earth, or under the earth is penetrated with connectedness, penetrated with relatedness.

Or, take some more words from Pope Frances, “each creature reflects something of God and has a message to convey to us - the knowledge that Christ has taken unto himself this material world, and now risen, is intimately present to each being, surrounding it with his affection, filling it with his light..... then too there is the recognition that God created the world writing into it an order and a dynamism that human beings must embrace.” L S 221

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