

Sunday 13th June 2021 – Bulwell United Reformed Church

In this week's reading, Mark 4: 26-34 Jesus shares two parables about growth, patience and hope. As Jesus continues to draw crowds who gather to listen to his teaching, these parables speak about how this teaching is heard and received. The adventure of discipleship is how faith can grow from a small seed to a colossal plant with far-reaching branches, if the right environment is provided.

Call to worship

For your love that never changes,

we praise you, O God.

For the miracle of growth,

we praise you, O God.

For stories that tell of your love,

we praise you, O God.

A prayer of confession

Lord, we come to you with open hearts
and confess that often we're not
as tuned in to you as we should be.

We are too caught up in our own business
and only listen to you with half an ear.

We know that we miss so much.

***Forgive us, Lord, and help us to settle,
focusing on you and the unfolding possibilities
of your kingdom.***

Amen.

Our Father

Song O Lord my God (How great Thou art)

[\(554\) O Lord my God \(How great Thou art\) - YouTube](#)

Mark 4: 26-34

The parable of the growing seed

²⁶ He also said, 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. ²⁷ Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. ²⁸ All by itself the soil produces corn – first the stalk, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹ As soon as the corn is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.'



The parable of the mustard seed

³⁰ Again he said, 'What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. ³² Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.'

³³ With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. ³⁴ He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything. (NIVUK)

Small Things Matter

The Parable of the Growing Seed - The parable of the growing seed is about patience. This parable of the growing seed (vv.26-29) suggests that the kingdom comes slowly, but inevitably.

In the first three chapters, Mark's Gospel has dashed breathlessly from one episode to the next, but here the narrative slows right down. Having sown the seed, the farmer can do nothing but wait for nature to take its course. He sleeps and rises, day after day, with no idea of what is going on under the ground (v.27). Once the farmer has sown the seed, he must wait patiently for nature to take its course. The earth will gradually produce a crop.

Similarly, Jesus' followers are called to trust, even when they cannot see, the parable explores the image of growing seed: the mystery of its growth, through 'sleeping' and 'rising,' images of death and resurrection, the way of the cross and the mysterious way of the growth of the kingdom.

So the people of the kingdom – the community of Jesus' followers identified as his new family in last week's passage – are clearly called to wait patiently, trusting even when they cannot see that God's kingdom is coming, slowly but inevitably. The things of God are taking effect in our world, slowly but surely. And when the crop is finally ripe, the harvest will come quickly and decisively. After the waiting, there is a sense of urgency, as God acts quickly and decisively (v.29) to harvest the crop. God is building a new reality both in this age and in the age to come. Therefore, we sow and we plant both individually and as a community. We must be purposeful and we must pray.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed - The second parable (vv.30-32) suggests what that new reality might look like. The tiny mustard seed grows into a great tree which offers hospitality to nesting birds. The image of birds nesting in the tree is rich with meaning, conveying a sense of hospitality, nurture, protection, creativity and freedom. The kingdom is clearly a realm in which everyone is invited to flourish, individually and together.

This rich image offers encouragement to Jesus' small group of followers – God is building them up into a big community. The kingdom they hope for will nurture and protect all who seek it and everyone is invited to flourish. The new people of the kingdom may feel small and weak, but they can trust that God is at work, steadily growing them into a vast community in which all sorts of people can find a home - We are this community today.

The image of the kingdom of God pervades Mark, and is a metaphor evoking a new future breaking over the horizon in which our communal living is grounded in the life of God.

Learning to listen, discern, and hear what God is saying to us in Scripture and the world around us is an important part of discipleship.

Allowing the kingdom of God to grow involves a mysterious pattern of death and resurrection, of 'letting go' limited horizons of love and concern, and allowing God to grow in us bold, inclusive energy to usher us into a whole new way of being, marked by God's universal love for all. In this new kingdom way of living, we are blessed, not only for ourselves, or our clan or our tribe, but we are blessed in order that we may be a universal blessing to all.

Prayers of intercession

Lord, we thank you for your ongoing love for us.
Like trees stretching up to the sun
we want to grow upwards towards you.
We bring the people of your world before you
and pray for those who do not find their security in you.
We ask that the gifts of your creation
will be spread more fairly,
and that those who have nothing
might receive enough to start them off.
We pray for those who waste wealth,
that they will see their mistakes.
We pray that your people will hear your word
and that, understanding it,
they may grow ever closer to you.



Amen.

Please add your prayers for others you wish to pray for today . . .

Song Once again (Jesus Christ I think upon your sacrifice) Matt Redman

[\(554\) Once Again - Matt Redman \(with lyrics\) - YouTube](#)

HOLY COMMUNION – Small things matter

We give you all thanks and praise, O God,
for your kingdom grows from the smallest beginnings,
and you have given us all a home in the shelter of your love.

You created the heavens and the earth,
and from the tiniest seeds, you filled the earth with life.
You called your people to walk by faith, not by sight,
and you anointed faithful rulers to lead them in your ways.

Your child, Jesus, came among us
sharing stories of your love and grace
and teaching us the mysteries of your kingdom.

He died at the hands of those who take pride in brute force,
and in his death, all have died.
But you raised him to life for us,
and in him everything has become new.
Now we are confident that you will grant
our heart's true desire:
to be at home with you forever.

***Therefore, with our hearts lifted high,
we offer you thanks and praise at all times
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.***

The Sharing of the Bread and the Wine

On the night of his arrest,
Jesus sat with his friends,
Having welcomed them,
waited on them and fed them.
He took bread and broke it,
blessed wine and shared it,

Saying:

This is my body, broken for you.
This is my blood, shed for you:
Do this to remember me.

[sharing of the bread and wine]

Prayer after communion

God of a love stronger than death, you have given us new birth into a living hope through the gift of your Son.

God with us, you have fed us with yourself and strengthened us for journeying ahead.

God of truth and power, you take our weakness and our sin and refashion us by grace.

Gracious God, may the love which bids us welcome at this table gather all your children into one, in your eternal presence, whole and free at last.

Amen.

A sending out prayer

God of surprises, as we go on our way,
may we delight in your growth, flourish in your love,
and share your hope with the world.

Amen.



