

## The Kingdom of Heaven (Mark 4:26-34)

The parable of the Mustard seed that we have just heard this morning is about the Kingdom of God (verse 26 and verse 30). And did you know, the Kingdom of God was the first thing that Jesus spoke about when he began his public ministry (after his baptism in the River Jordan by John)

These were the words of Jesus after his baptism:

'Repent!' for the *Kingdom of God* is at hand'.

So the Kingdom of God is central to the Messianic message.

But what does Jesus mean by it?

The arrival of the Kingdom of God marks the beginnings of the end of this fallen world and the arrival of God's Kingdom, where Christ reigns supreme!

And it is none other than Christ himself, God made flesh, who ushers in this new kingdom, the Kingdom of God.

As I have said already, the Kingdom of God is the place where God reigns supreme. A seminal moment in the coming of the Kingdom of God is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. And so the Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ two thousand years ago has initiated the beginnings of events which will eventually lead to this world passing away and Jesus reigning supreme. Now this should be no surprise to the follower of Jesus. The scriptures tell us that this world is passing away. John the Apostle writes, 'the world and its desires are passing away but whoever does the will of God lives forever.' (1 John 2:17). The climax of all this will ultimately happen when Christ returns and this is why the early Christians cried out, 'Maranatha!' Come Lord Jesus! When this happens heaven shall reign on earth, with Christ sitting on the throne.

So it no surprise that as part of his ministry here on earth Jesus taught the crowds, like this morning in our Gospel reading, about the coming of the Kingdom of God, 'where God reigns supreme.

So let us look at our Gospel reading this morning. Jesus taught the crowd in parables using familiar scenes to convey the truths about the coming Kingdom of God. And in our reading we have two parables about the Kingdom of God.

The first parable is the parable of the growing seed. (Mark Chapter 4:26-29), and the second the parable of the mustard seed. So firstly the growing seed.

'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how.'

In the parable of the growing seed Jesus is making it clear that the sower sows the seed, but he does not know when or how the seed will grow. In fact, all the sower seems to do is scatter the seed and go to bed and get up again! And just to make sure of this point Jesus says, 'he does not know how it grows! (verse 27). The sower in both these parables is God's representative. That is you and me, or the early apostles, or Christians across the globe today. Then Jesus tells us that the earth produces of itself until the sower returns to harvest the crop.

So what is Jesus saying to us here? He is telling us two things. Firstly, that his representatives will be responsible for sowing the seed of faith in others, and the harvesting of that seed. In what way we don't exactly know, but we will be there at the harvest. This will be the end of time.

Secondly, as I have alluded to already, Jesus is saying that what makes the Kingdom of God grow, is out of our hands. It is God who makes things grow! What we must do is sow the seed. We do this by living out our faith and telling people about the Good News of Jesus Christ. So that is the message of the first parable, the parable of the growing seed.

But what about the parable of the mustard seed? Why do we need a second parable about seeds? Is the parable of the mustard trying to convey something else about the Kingdom of God?

Well they are similar parables because they both illustrate the Kingdom of God, but the emphasis is slightly different with the parable of the mustard seed. Here

Jesus majors on the smallness of the seed that is being planted. The mustard seed was the smallest of the seeds common to Jewish folk at the time.

And so in Verse 31 Jesus say, 'The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed which when it is sown upon the ground is the smallest of all the seeds of the earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nest in its shade.'

Here Jesus is encouraging us in our faith. As God transforms a tiny speck of mustard seed into a ten-foot high shrub, God will accomplish extraordinary things through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. And he does that through us. His followers. And don't we see it in this rather shabby group of men whom Jesus chose to be his disciples. Never would they have thought that the message they were preaching would have such far-reaching effects. That their works are enshrined in our scriptures!

But I believe more than anything that the parable of the mustard seed is a source of encouragement to the individual believer today. That is you and me today. Jesus is encouraging us in our faith today. The church of Jesus Christ is made of billions of individual believers. Collectively they are the body of Christ, but in our day to day lives we are largely on our own. And the life of the believer can be tough. We are told that this will be the case. And so in this parable Jesus is encouraging us that although individually we are very small, we are part of something *much greater*. Greater than you can even imagine. One day, we will be part of something that will reign supreme (the Kingdom of God). So we should be excited about this. This is the Christian hope. This is why the Apostle Paul said of believers who had fallen asleep, 'we do not grieve as others do who have no hope, for the Lord himself will come down from heaven and the dead in Christ will rise first' (1 Th. 4:13-18). This is a reference to Day of the Lord when the earth will be renewed and God's Kingdom shall be established on earth. And we will be part of it.

By using the grain of the mustard seed, Jesus was saying, "With your faith in God, just your faith, tiny that it may seem, great things will be accomplished.' *That is* the Kingdom of God! Jesus is saying to you, his workers, in due season there will

be a harvest, in due season all things will be accomplished. In due season your faith will be rewarded. So keep calm and carry on!

Never be discounted by small beginnings. Never think that *your* faith as inadequate, or your church is only small. That is not how Jesus sees it. It may seem at the moment we can only produce only a very small effect, but over time our seed of faith will become something, much, much, greater! It is a bit like the science experiment that teachers do at school to show the effect of dyes. I am sure you all know it. The teacher gets a large vessel of clear water and a little phial of dye. Drop by drop the dye is dropped into the clear water. At first it seems to have no effect at all and the water does not seem to be coloured in the least. Then quite suddenly the water begins to tinge with the colour. Bit by bit the colour deepens until the whole vessel is coloured. *It is the repeated drops that produce the effect.* And so it is with the Kingdom of God. Bit by Bit the kingdom of heaven is increasing. There is the awakening of a new dawn.

So when you feel alone in your stand for Christ, when many of your friends are not believers, realize that God has faithful followers in all parts of the world. Your faith, no matter how small, as small as a mustard seed, can join with that of others to accomplish great things. God promises that his harvest will be prolific. Our witness may be weak and our efforts may seem to influence few, but the Word of God is powerful. and mighty to save! **AMEN.**