

Sermons at Christ Church

Be a Joyful Gift to Others.

Pentecost 4

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Two parables about the kingdom of God. Jesus begins today's gospel with a description of the kingdom of God. It is as if someone scatters seed on the ground. The person doesn't know how the seeds sprout and grow but the person knows when to harvest.

Again, the kingdom of God is like a mustard which is the smallest of all seeds but when it is planted, it does not only grow to become the biggest of all shrubs but the birds of the air make their home on it.

Two visions of what the kingdom of God is like. Jesus doesn't explicitly tell what the kingdom of God is, he simply tells us what it is like. It is plausible then to assume that there isn't one particular way in which we can describe the kingdom of God. The kingdom is beyond any one single description.

The kingdom of God is like someone scattering seeds on the ground. Like an ancient farmer who plants by throwing the seeds in the air, the kingdom of God is like someone planting seeds. The one who scatters the seeds has control over the seeds but doesn't have control over how the seed grows.

For those who have been farmers before or have planted a garden before, think about the many seeds you have planted. Through sowing a seed, you can realize your control over the seeds that you plant but you don't know how that same seed grows nor do you have any control over how they grow. The growth of the seed is beyond your control and mine. God causes the seed to grow. You may apply as much fertilizer as you can, but it is God who causes the seed to grow.

If it is God who has control over the growth, then we don't have to be anxious about the growth- God takes care of the growth. Our task is to scatter the seeds-seeds, like the word of God, don't die. Seeds offer the possibility of new life. Seeds reminds us that all is not lost-there is still life.

You and I may not have any control over the growth of the kingdom of God, but we have control over the scattering of the seed.

Imagine yourself in a sailboat on a lake. The sailboat does not have any engine to power it. What moves the sailboat is the wind. When you consider the movement of the sailboat, the first thing that comes to mind is that you do not have control over the wind the moves the sailboat. You don't have control over the speed of the wind or the direction of the wind.

But the person who is driving the sailboat has control over something-and that's the sail. The person who is driving the sailboat may not have control over the wind but has control over the sail. And when you have control over the sail, the wind which you cannot control takes you to where you want to go. We cannot control the wind but we can control the sail.

The sail is that living gift which is in you and which Jesus refers to as the mustard seed-it is the smallest of all seeds but its growth isn't determined by its size. To focus on the size of the seed is to miss the point.

The kingdom of God is not about how small it begins, it is about what the end product is, it is about its transformative effect, it is about its life changing impact, it is about new life, new possibilities. And so, however small that seed is, do not underestimate the value of that seed. That seed makes possible the kingdom of God. And you have control over that seed.

For those who have been to Great Britain before, I am sure you saw the double decker bus. There's a story of a huge picture of an egg and bacon on a double decker bus. And on the egg and bacon was written-the great British breakfast.

It just so happened the bus went past a field and on that field was a chicken and a pig. The chicken said to the pig 'Look, look, look, we're famous. Wherever the bus goes, it talks about us-egg and bacon, the great British breakfast.' The pig turned to the chicken and said 'It is alright for you, isn't it. You only have to make a contribution but for me, it costs me my life.'

Jesus is not interested in contributions. Jesus is interested in how much it costs you to be an agent of the kingdom of God.

Many are the conversations that I have had over the years with parents who express deep worry over the fact that their children, whom they believed were brought up in the church, now refuse to go to church. There's a story of a grandmother secretly baptized a grandchild because the child's parents wouldn't bring the grandchild for baptism. As gracious as that may be, that is not the point of the kingdom of God.

The point of the kingdom is that in so far as you have scattered the seed, you have done the right thing and brought your children up in a godly way-through the scattering of the seed. If you taught them that the kingdom of God is about love, justice, compassion, generosity, kindness, mercy, wholeness and mending, you don't have to control the growth of the seed that you planted in them nor do you have to be anxious about that seed. God controls the growth of that seed.

In the Old Testament story, the prophet Ezekiel talks about the new beginnings to which God is calling the people of Israel. The people of Israel are in exile in Babylon. The prophet reminds the people that God will restore Israel-Israel will experience the peace that comes with the kingdom of God. The prophet sows seeds of hope but it is God who does the work of restoration.

The prophet says, like a sprig plucked from the top of a cedar tree, and planted on top of a mountain, Israel will be planted on top of a mountain. Israel will be restored. But it is God who has control over the restoration and not the people themselves. Israel's restoration would generate a renewed appreciation of their relationship with God. But the restoration would be meaningless unless the newly restored bears fruit, fruits of the kingdom of God.

For the prophet, the value of any restoration lies in the ability to bear fruit, and if Israel is a tree planted on top of a mountain, then Israel will have to bear fruit- the fruit is, a newly restored Israel will no longer exist for itself but will exist for the sake of others.

The old has passed away, behold the new has come.

A new Israel will be like the cedar tree which is home for the birds of the air, a restored Israel will be a welcoming home for all those who seek refuge and for all who seek the face of God. A restored Israel would more than represent the kingdom of God on earth; it would be the symbol of human hope in the seeds of the kingdom of God.

This is a kind reminder from the prophet-we have control over the seeds but God has control over the process of growth.

Here's a story for you. During a Sunday service on father's day, a pastor wanted to know how many men are controlled by their wives. And so he asked all men who are controlled by their wives to move to the left side of the sanctuary. All the men moved to the left side apart from one man. The pastor was excited that at least there's one man in the sanctuary who isn't controlled by the wife. 'I am so glad you are not being controlled by your wife.' The pastor 'Now tell us, why did you not move?' The man responded that 'My wife asked me not to move.'

If we walk by faith and not by sight as St Paul reminds us, then for us to also bear fruit like the people of Israel, for us to scatter the seeds of the kingdom of God, we have to recognize the tension between sight and faith.

To walk by sight is to believe that we have control over how the kingdom of God comes about. But that belief gets in our way and frequently turns us into our own worst enemies.

To walk by faith, on the other hand, disentangles us from the corrosive web of selfishness, self-indulgence and narcissism and frees us to live, not only for ourselves but for others. It is to feel free enough to scatter the seed and watch the seed grow till harvest time-knowing that you have no control, it is God who controls the growth.

That seeds of the kingdom lies in you. That is why you have control over them. The one who scatters the seeds only scatters love, justice, compassion, generosity, kindness, mercy, wholeness and mending. The one sows a mustard seed only sows love, justice, compassion, generosity, kindness, mercy, wholeness and mending. And these are not beyond your control.

As a father, I am acutely aware of the responsibilities that I owe, not only to my children but to all children, to create the kingdom of God for them-scatter the seeds of love, justice, compassion, generosity, kindness, wholeness and mending, and watch the seed grow to harvest time.

If a restored Israel helps us to appreciate the blessings of new beginnings, then you have to believe that a mustard seed can grow to become a shrub upon which others may find a sanctuary-but you have to first plant it. You have to plant it. So go ahead, scatter the seeds, sow the seeds and watch them grow to harvest time. Happy Father's Day!! **Amen.**