

**Sunday 17 June 2018 (3<sup>rd</sup> after Trinity, Proper 6)**

**St Andrew's, Cobham, 8 a.m. and 10 a.m.**

**Ezekiel 17.22-end; 2 Corinthians 5.6-10, 14-17; Mark 4.26-34.**

**Mustard seeds and the meaning of life**

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This morning I'd like to reflect on our reading from Mark in which Jesus talks about the kingdom of heaven and says it is like a seed that is planted and then grows and grows.

I've called this sermon 'Mustard seeds and the meaning of life', and that is because, in this little verse, there is a way of understanding what life as a follower of Jesus is all about. It is an understanding that can help us to see and appreciate how deeply significant a Christian's life is, and how full of meaning – every minute of every day.

I think many of us have at times in our lives felt weighed down by a sense of defeat and futility, as if the problems of the world or even just of our own lives are too big to be overcome; moments when it seems that nothing within our power to do is really worth doing. Moments when we think, 'What's the point?'

It is at those times that we most need to remember what Jesus teaches his disciples about the mustard seed.

But first let's go back a step.

Jesus uses the mustard seed to try and explain the kingdom of heaven.

Now, what exactly is the kingdom of heaven?

When Jesus talks about the kingdom of heaven, he means the place where God's will is done – where God reigns supreme. At present, God's will is done in heaven but not on earth. We know this well, and acknowledge it every time we say the Lord's Prayer – 'Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'.

When Jesus began his ministry he started saying something very startling – namely, that the kingdom of heaven had arrived on earth. With the birth of Jesus, and the start of his ministry, something had changed – God's programme to establish his rule on earth as in heaven had begun. There was a new power operating in the world, and we see it in all that Jesus did - his miracles, his healings, and his exorcisms. These things were signposts to what was happening

– God had begun to rebuild his creation, to make things right and whole, through his Son, Jesus.

Jesus also makes it clear that the kingdom of heaven wouldn't come about in one big sudden moment but would happen in stages. It would be like a seed being planted, he says, and then growing and growing, we know not how, until one day, when the time was right, the harvest would happen – things would reach a culmination, and God would finally establish his kingdom for once and for all, on earth as it is in heaven.

Any doubts we may have about this are removed by the resurrection of Jesus. In the resurrection, we see with full force that, through Jesus, God is remaking everything. As St Paul puts it, Jesus is the first fruits of God's new creation [1 Cor 15.20]

God is busy remaking his precious creation into a place where one day he will reign supreme through his Son Jesus, a place made whole and perfect as it was meant to be, like a marriage between heaven and earth [Revelation 21-22]. We may not see it now, when there is so much that is wrong in our world, but like the seed growing, everything is changing and developing towards this ultimate goal.

But where does that leave us, as followers of Jesus?

Many people think that what Christianity says is that if we give our lives to Jesus then when we die we will go to a place called heaven and live there in a disembodied state for ever, leaving the poor old earth behind to its fate.

But that is not what the Bible teaches.

The Bible says that we who follow Jesus will be part of the new creation that God is busy making. We are promised that just as Jesus rose from the dead as the first fruits of the new creation, so we too will one day rise again [1 Corinthians 15.23]. When we die, there will be a time of rest with our Lord in paradise [Luke 23.40-43]. But then one day, when the time is right, when the seeds have become plants ready to be harvested, our Lord will return and we will be raised up to meet him.

And we will have work to do! We will be deeply involved in God's new creation. We won't be floating around in the clouds playing harps. We will have bodies - solid, real bodies - just as Christ did after his resurrection [Philippians 3.20].

And that brings me full circle back to where we started – mustard seeds and the meaning of life.

If God is building his new creation, the kingdom of heaven, right here and now, and if we are destined to be a part of that new creation, as followers of Christ, then our lives are deeply significant. What we do here and now, the way we lead our lives in the present, matters because it contributes ultimately to God's new creation. Nothing we do now out of love for Jesus is wasted or irrelevant. No matter how small the action, it will make an eternal contribution to our Lord's new creation - just like a mustard seed growing into a great tree.

We should never give in to discouragement or despair. We must never feel that we are useless or that our lives are meaningless. Just think of those mustard seeds! A kind word, an act of patience, giving a pound with a cheerful heart, painting a beautiful picture, the knitting of a jumper for someone, planting a tree, forgiving someone – being a good father - all of these things have echoes in eternity, no matter how inconsequential they seem. In the face of the world's great problems, we must never forget that we are the custodians of God's creation – the one we see around us, and the new one he is creating. The more we plant these little mustard seeds out of love and loyalty to Jesus, the more we help to establish God's ultimate kingdom.

So let us go out into the world now, and offer our small and humble acts of love wherever we go, knowing that one day we will see and understand how those little mustard seeds have grown into magnificent trees in the kingdom of heaven.

Amen.