

*In the name of the father, son and Holy Spirit Amen*

I was very tempted today to preach one of my "I love gardening" sermons, what with the planting of cedar sprigs in our reading from Ezekiel, the scattering of seed which grows without apparent agency from others, and the likening of the kingdom of God to a teeny tiny mustard seed. But as I began to dig deeper into our readings for today, I realised that a nice neat pat I love gardening type sermon was far too superficial for what are some complex and perhaps slightly mysterious readings. And as Paul wrote in his second letter to the Corinthians, "from now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view, even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer that way"

Yep – its complicated! Parables are of course! They seem like lovely simple stories, and we certainly, most of us learn them as children and are familiar with them as stories. But as Jesus himself recognised, the parables really needed explanation – something he gave to his disciples, but not to the thousands listening to him speak and tell the stories themselves. Did he mean to be so cryptic I wonder? Was he saying that to really understand the stories, you had to become disciples, to follow Christ – and become Kingdom people. Or was he trying to get people to think beyond the obvious – to realise the great mystery and the great wonder that is the Kingdom of God. In talking about mustard seeds becoming shade trees for birds was he remembering his good Jewish teaching, and the Ezekiel text we heard this morning. Or as we normally think about parables was he using metaphors to explain what the Lord God's kingdom was, in his creation on earth and in his eternity of love and fulfilment.

Who knows! Well probably lots of scholars! Talmudic, Christian and others have of course spent many hours and years unpicking these texts – analysing them and exploring their meanings. But as an ordinary Christian whose academic bent is somewhat limited, I have arrived at three thoughts about them.

Firstly they are rooted in examples and descriptions of our beautiful, fruitful, God given, created world, but be in no doubt – it is God's creation (as Ezekiel makes clear) – and we abuse it at our peril. The natural world speaks to us of God's presence and nature. It is by God's grace and God's will (helped along by humanity) that plants grow and become fruitful, provide shelter and care...the fruit of any harvest is his, but it is for us to put in the effort, and to care for God's creation here on earth if we are to see and be part of his new creation. Care for our physical world is an urgent and immediate imperative, not an optional extra.

Secondly, we have a tough job to do. It is for us to go out and announce the Kingdom. We may not as yet know what it is like but we certainly know that we too are ultimately created by God, each and every one of us wonderful varied "species" with all our glorious differences, and if we are to grow, to flourish, to provide nourishment, shade, fruit of the soul and spirit to others we have hard work to do -on ourselves – to grow in the faith of Christ, through our own spiritual disciplines, prayer, reflection, worship, and care for others. The kingdom values we learn about need to be lived out by us in

real life, we need to try to move beyond the challenges, flaws, weaknesses, mistakes and plain sinfulness of our human lives and demonstrate how not to be one of the "me" generation but a "you and they in Gods image" generation. And it only by our daily putting in the hard yards, following a spiritual journey with God, living by a rule of life that is Christ centred and other-focussed will we become one with Christ – as Paul urges.

And thirdly, the adventure of discipleship, of following that journey of faith when we can plant seeds, bring them what they need to germinate, through study and prayer, water them with praise and worship, feed and nurture them in the soil of fellowship and love and trust in God to bring them from scattered seeds to fruitful trees in their own right. We are called to create favourable conditions for the Kingdom of God to flourish in others as well as ourselves. We are both seeds ourselves and gardeners of other seeds, we are to grow and to help grow, to understand the ups and downs of growing well, and growing badly and to seek to see right into the heart of life. Because this is what the kingdom of God is like, growing mysteriously and wonderfully.

Complex though they may be, in these texts we are drawn to focus on the mysterious energy secretly at work in the world – not only the Church – to produce the growth of God's kingdom. And we must entrust ourselves to God's wisdom, act, whilst seeking wisdom, allow God to come alongside us, and recognise that it is by our agency in the world, as seeds, as gardeners, and crucially as protectors of creation, that we will grow in faith and will become those kingdom people of Christ that create and generate the growth of the ever spreading every growing trees of faith that in and of themselves then shelter, shade and nurture us.

Amen