

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

The Thought for the Week

Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2020

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us how something so small, something that is invisible to the naked eye can grow rapidly into a destructive force that consumes all our attention and resources, as individuals, communities, nations, and indeed, as a world.

In one of the 40 parables that Jesus told, He described how the Kingdom of Heaven emerges from something almost invisible to the naked eye and grows, offering us all security and hope and refuge – “The Kingdom of Heaven,” He said, “is like a mustard seed.....but when it is grown, it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

Do you remember those little trays where we planted and grew mustard and cress on blotting paper in Primary 5? Well, for years, my understanding of the mustard plant was that it was about one-inch-tall when harvested with a pair of round-nosed scissors! Not much room for the birds of the air to make their nests there, I thought!

And in this story Jesus told, in those Sunday School days, I was not very impressed with His understanding of botany. Was Jesus’ understanding of horticulture lacking somewhat?

So, the Kingdom of Heaven, or the Kingdom of God, says Jesus, is like a mustard seed, and, by and by, it grows into a tree.

It is tiny; it is buried; it is planted in a field. And, indeed, as I was to find out later, the mustard plant that grew in Palestine can indeed be compared to a small tree, a shrub. Not a towering oak, not a spreading chestnut, not even an attractive apple tree. Just a bush.

Often I hear Christians criticising unauthorized immigration, and they quote the Bible in support of anger, fear and hostility against those so-called foreigners. On other occasions, the Lord is invoked against caring for creation, or in support of sectarian marches, or against same-sex marriage, or in support of another war.... on and on and on. Then Jesus comes along and says, “For Pete’s sake! You have got it all wrong! God’s way is not the mighty cedars of Lebanon. God is not into spectacle and power, of flying flags, of beating drums, and shouting and yelling.”

God’s way is a mustard seed.

When Jesus first spoke those words, He was out in the Galilean countryside with quite a following of people – all sorts of folk – peasants and sick folk, people who had been ostracised by the religious authorities who regarded them as being “impure”, unimportant people in the eyes of the powerful of the day. A rag tag mixture of ordinary folk who certainly would not have won “Palestine’s Got Talent” Show and become rich and famous.

Yet our Lord knew full well that, behind each life there, unimpressive and seemingly insignificant, God was at work.

Simon, the blustering, disloyal fisherman became the rock on which the Church was built.

An angry Pharisee called Saul, hounding those early Christians and trying to eradicate the name of Jesus, became Paul, the greatest missionary of the faith who ever lived.

Martin Luther, a sixteenth century monk, away yonder in the monastery in Wittenberg, coping with depression, with all the forces of Christendom arrayed against his reforming zeal, and the Protestant Church was born.

That saintly Yugoslavian Nun, Mother Theresa of Calcutta, said to her superiors, "I have three pennies and I intend to build an orphanage." "But, Mother Theresa," they chided, "with three pennies you cannot possibly build an orphanage."

"I know," she said, "but with God and three pennies, I can do anything!"

This little story which Jesus told reminds us again that God's beginnings may be small, but His results are great.

You and I are invited to participate in building the Kingdom of God here in Prestwick, right now. We are invited to be a part of God's beautiful story of peace and love and joy and justice. We are invited to sow the seeds and wait.

When someone hurts us, our hearts yell, "Hold a grudge!", and the Kingdom whispers, "Forgive!"

When our judging mind yells, "She hasn't done enough to support our Kirk.", and the Kingdom whispers, "Have I done enough to help?"

When our wounded mind shouts "Get your own back", the Kingdom whispers, "Love!"

When the chaos all around us exclaims, "Be afraid!", the mustard seed kingdom says quietly, "All is well! Courage!"

Friends, as the people of God in this town, our story is to seek the Kingdom in our congregation, in our street, in our office, in our places of relaxation.

Yes, these are difficult days for our country and for our national Church. But remember that God is working quietly through ordinary folk loving and caring and forgiving and serving others.

Never, never underestimate what He can do through you!

The Revd Fraser R Aitken

Locum Minister