

SERMON: Sunday – 13 June 2021 – Rev Alistair Cowper

The Great Mystery Beyond Our Control

2 Corinthians 5:6-10, 14-17

Mark 4:26-34

Here's some things we can learn about kingdom growth from the two parables in Mark 4:26-34.

It's out with our control.

It's a mystery to us.

In time there is fruit to be harvested.

It's the maximum increase possible - from the smallest to the largest.

It offers sanctuary (shade) for others.

I saw a couple of things this week that spoke to me of these things.

First of all, this picture of beauty from rubble in Broompark tells of growth being out with man's control, a mystery as to where it came from, a beauty to behold, an abundance to harvest, and a sanctuary for insects and wildlife.

Secondly, as I lay in the garden in the sun on the sun lounger beneath a cherry tree, there were this family of starlings, two males, two fledglings, sunning themselves in the branches. And there were several other species too, resting, basking, feeding, singing.

Oh that we could experience the kingdom of God like the birds do.

Paul speaks of people in Christ as being a new creation (5:17), a *kaine ktisis* in the Greek.

ὥστε εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις

Ktidzo is to make habitable, to people a place, to found a city, to completely transform. It was sometimes used to describe someone's change to becoming a convert to Judaism from paganism. But Paul uses it to describe the inner work, out with man's control, a mystery, with a harvest to come and a sanctuary to provide.

Those who are in Christ are a new creation of kingdom growth, who now aim to please God rather than themselves only (5:9) because they are now compelled by Christ's love (5:14).

There it is, that's the power behind the mystery, Christ's love, the power to transform every single situation, every single life.

So we can never lose hope and never give up because we have this power within which can and will transform all things.

Sarah was reminding me yesterday of our need to be thankful and joyful through whatever circumstances we are facing. And here is a great reason to be thankful - that God's love compels us, sustains us, holds us and transforms us.

I spoke last week of more changes coming to the church and indeed changes that are both needed and, many believe, are God inspired.

This week at the presbytery meeting, Ken Ross, mission partner in Malawi spoke of the ongoing growth of the church there and how the growth is essentially a multiplication of the number of small congregations meeting together.

What he was describing was Church planting in essence. And all it starts with 2 or 3 from an existing congregation starting up a prayer house which in time becomes its own congregation and even beyond that joins with other new congregations to become a presbytery!

Now I don't think Ken was saying that the kingdom of God is presbyterian in nature or any other single flavour or denomination. But his point was that the church is growing still and it's happening, yes beyond our control, but where there is an intention to want to grow beyond oneself.

And that's the thing about kingdom growth. Because it's rooted in love for the other, it wants to grow beyond itself. It's not content to be alone. It reaches out because it can't help but do that, that's the nature of divine love, the very love that compels us in and through Christ.

And it's therefore right to say that kingdom growth is all beyond our control because even the very intention to want to reach beyond itself comes from the God who is love. The foundation of the kingdom of God is the love of Christ and the love of the Spirit.

So we give thanks and we rejoice today that this great power is now at work in all of us as the new creation. We are a people of life transforming resurrection power, and we have the intention to see all of society changed into the kingdom of light.

I wonder where that intention will lead us this week.

Let us pray

O Holy One, Root of Love

Thank you that in Christ we are a new creation.

May your love continue to transform us into the image and likeness of Christ.

And may your love compel us to work for the coming of your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

In Jesus name. Amen.