

SERMON 14 JUNE 2015

Reading: Mark 4:26-34

WHAT IS THE CONTEXT OF OUR READING?

Jesus always used parables to convey His message. I guess they are like power-point illustrations in our day helping us to understand certain things better.

Our reading consists of two parables and a commentary.

The first parable is found exclusively in Mark. The parable of the seed growing by itself has its own unique message to convey. In this parable the sower plays a minimal role – in fact the sower has no input in the mystery of the seeds growing. Jesus was saying in a big way that God will decide who is entering the kingdom. We can only sow the seeds but God will make it grow. God is actively involved in the lives of people. The end emphasis and, perhaps, primary focus of the parable is the assurance of the harvest. The harvest almost certainly represents the judgment at the end of the age. The kingdom of God is the manifestation of the righteous.

The second parable is also very unique in comparison to the other Gospels and reminds us that Mark is the oldest Gospel narrative in our Bibles. Jesus says the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed you plant in the ground.

I think this phrase must have been shocking to Mark's first Jewish readers because a mustard seed was considered as unclean, invading the healthy crops on the field. In Leviticus 19:19 the ritual law states: "Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed". The mustard Jesus referred to may be the charlock or wild mustard, *Brassica. arvensis*, which normally grows from one to three feet (0.3 to 0.9 metre) tall. The implication is clear: In the kingdom of earth no one is allowed to plant a mustard seed but in the kingdom of

heaven it is different. God would not exclude anyone from the kingdom because he/she violated the ritual cleansing rules of society. God would not do what their society generally did by excluding people from His presence. In the kingdom of God everyone that has faith like a mustard seed is welcome!

And then the last part is the concluding bit, or the application. And like I said in the beginning, Jesus used word pictures or parables so that His disciples could understand. But Mark adds that Jesus always explained everything to them.

So what is the message? Apart from the fact that Jesus is portrayed as a good teacher, He is telling them what the kingdom of God is going to be like.

The parable of the growing seed (vv.26-29) suggests that the kingdom comes slowly, but inevitably. In the first three chapters, the Gospel has dashed breathlessly from one episode to the next, but here the narrative slows right down. Having sown the seed, the farmer can do nothing but wait for nature to take its course. He sleeps and rises, day after day, with no idea of what is going on under the ground (v.27). The people of the kingdom are clearly called to wait patiently, trusting even when they cannot see. All the while, Jesus says, 'the earth is producing of itself' (v.28), literally 'bearing fruit of its own accord'. The things of God are taking effect in our world, slowly but surely. And when the crop is finally ripe, the harvest will come quickly and decisively. The image of the harvest adds a futuristic perspective to the kingdom. God is building a new reality both in this age and in the age to come.

And the kingdom of God is for everyone – even the one that planted an unclean mustard seed in the ground. No- one will be excluded. God will decide who will enter.

Amen

LET US APPLY THE MEANING OF OUR READING

Our reading can be summarised by three words - patience, hope and understanding.

Patience is a virtue...who said it? Because it is so true especially when you are in a hurry and someone is learning to drive in front of you. Or when you talk to your beloved wife and husband and they ignore you. Or when you ask someone to do something for you and they take forever to complete it. I am sure you all know what I am talking about. But although it is sometimes hard for us to be patient, the Lord God is telling us that we need to have patience when it comes to spiritual matters. We cannot force other people to have faith, hope and love. We are called to set an example and wait for God to work in the hearts of people. We cannot convince our Parish to praise God in the face of tragedy, bereavement and illness. No, once again, we can only tell them patiently that God will make His face shine upon them in His own time and place. We cannot call people to follow God. God will do the calling. You and I can merely tell them about God.

But how will we make them understand? Patiently, lovingly - or are we going to start a campaign where we force them into submission. Today's parable is a stark reminder of how differently extremist groups are forcing their followers to either submit to one truth or die. It is so different from the way Jesus taught his first disciples. And Jesus must be our example when we explain to others His message of hope and love.

Because everyone is invited to God's banquet of love – not only the selected few. During the week when I saw the first pictures on the news about the Chancellor, George Osborne's dinner in London, I could not help but praise God that His kingdom will be far removed from this and that His kingdom will surpass all the grandeur of this

lavish dinner. Everyone that has faith is invited and will enter God's kingdom.

And this is where hope comes into our existence. You and I have the living hope to know that if we continue believing, we will inherit His kingdom.

But we need to learn lessons of patience and love. We cannot exclude or judge or second guess the works of God. God will make any seed grow, even the unclean mustard seed, even when it fell on rocks. God is the Almighty One. He does not need us. We need Him.

May we all go out of this Church and approach summer with ONE thing in mind and that is to convey His message of hope with patience, love and inclusiveness. And yes, let us dance to the music of God's love with joy, because we are INVITED guests to the banquet of the MOST HIGH GOD!

Amen