

"Mustard Seed" (Matthew 13.31-33 & 44-52)

In the Name....

The 6th verse of the 17th chapter of the Holy Gospel according to Luke: "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea" and it would obey you.

When I was acting Priest-in-Charge at St Michael and All Saints in 1990 to 1991, I instituted the not-unpleasant tradition after Sunday Mass of what I called thirsting after righteousness, that is, going for a pint in the local pub. As you know, I do the same here on the first Sunday of the month – which happens to be today! I let it be known to one and all where I could be found. It became, as I had intended, a regular little surgery for me and various members of the congregation as we sorted out problems and discussed ideas in a relaxed informal atmosphere. It also, occasionally, led to a bit of evangelism.

One day I was enjoying my pint of 80 Shilling and I met this man who was a local tradesman. As we talked he asked me which church I was from and I told him. And then I invited him to come out and give the church a go.

"Well", he said, "I don't really know. I haven't been in a church for a long while. But I'll think about it; if you guys can come in here I don't see why I shouldn't go there." "Just come and enjoy yourself" I said, - there's always room for one more sinner. We have all kinds of sinners at our church"

The next Sunday the man showed up at the church with his wife. As he said, he hadn't been to church for a long time. He hadn't felt right about himself. He didn't think God was too pleased with him. He was uncomfortable in the places where he used to feel at ease. - That's how it is for a person when things aren't right - and to be frank - they aren't right some of the time for a whole lot of people.

But God calls us back - and he works with the tiniest seeds – the small bit of faith we have - and the tiniest bit of His Word - whatever he can get beyond a person's guilt and anxiety and remorse and worldly busyness and plant.

For that man - the word that the church was full of sinners was all he needed to hear - for the seed of faith he had told him that churches that welcomed sinners would welcome him. "I feel I've come home" he said. Now 30 years later he is a Rector's Warden in an active parish in northern Scotland.

Nothing can stop the growing of the seed because the Power of God is in the seed. Nothing can prevent the leaven from spreading because The Power of God is in the leaven. In God's kingdom the smallest and the least significant things have incredible power; the incredible power to affect the largest and most significant things and transform them.

From the seed that represented that man's faith - the man I met in the pub; and from the small seed of welcoming truth - the small seed of God that God helped me plant that day, has come a mighty bush - or to switch parables - a mighty tasty loaf. God takes a seed - he plants it - and slowly, but surely growth comes - until suddenly everyone notices it - we notice it and other people notice it in us. The mustard seed is the word of the kingdom of God - the word of truth - the word that points the way to the living reality of God in Christ among us. Jesus also speaks of faith in terms of yeast. And the yeast is the word that grows within us - the faith that rises up because that is the nature that God gave it - that rises up and makes new - that brings to life - that revives. In another two parables, Jesus calls us to treasure the message we have discovered in the field of life, to do everything to hold onto the wonder working seed and the miraculous yeast that we find, - or which finds us - for who can predict just how and why we would ever stumble upon treasure buried in the middle of a field? Or just how and why a pearl of tremendous beauty might come our way, even if we are merchants who deal in such things?

There has been many a priest and many a faithful Christian in the pew - who have let go of the treasure - and whose joy and delight in God - and whose trust and confidence in God - has been not as good as it once was. When a person finds something of great value, he or she has a decision to make; to obtain that treasure - no matter what the cost, or to be content with the treasure that he or she already has. Often what we do - is obtain the treasure - and then let it go.

We exchange it for lesser things - things that seem important at the time or maybe we just allow events to overwhelm us - so that the great treasure is once again buried in the field of our life. And then, to mix up the parables of Jesus even more, we suddenly come to our senses and return home to our Father; we decide to repurchase the pearl; to once again lay claim to the treasure.

There is a word from God for us - a touch of the Spirit for us - an event for us - a person who comes to us, for us - that is worth everything we have - So says Jesus! Don't let it go by. Pick up - hold on to it - don't let go. It is a saving thing that makes all of one's life worthwhile. The value of what God has given to us freely through his law and his prophets, the value of what God has buried in our hearts and our minds for us to find, what God has brought to us in the person of Christ and pours out upon us through his Spirit, is beyond everything. When we grasp it.

The challenge for us is to grasp it - to not only recognize what we see and hear as being important; but to take action - to hold on to it - to give everything we have for it where we can claim ownership of it.

What will happen is great. You'll be attacked by doubts and doubters, but you will see better things than you have seen before - and you'll know a love and show a love that the people who live only in this world can only dream about it.

Which flows, or perhaps stumbles, into another parable - the parable of the net – and of the judgement that comes once the net is drawn and landed on the shore of heaven. God casts his net to catch us all - he gives us all a chance to be his - he reaches out to us - he seeks us - and as the parables indicate - he goes to great lengths to make us into the kind of catch he wants. He is patient with us. He allows the weeds to grow so that the wheat is not uprooted - he changes what appears to be beyond hope into something that is worthy of praise. But still there is a time when the catch is landed and sorted for market, when the field is harvested, and the wheat and the weeds are separated.

A final word to those of us who are fairly sure that we belong among the weeds. Remember this; a weed is simply a plant that is growing in the wrong place; it is therefore a subjective judgement by any earthly rules.

There is a story of how England, Scotland and Wales got their National Emblems.

St George went to Dobbie's Garden Centre and bought a rose for its beauty. St David selected the elegant Daffodil. When St Andrew went he asked "Have you got any weeds?" "Only thistles out the back" replied the gardener, "you can have them for free". "Free are they?" said St Andrew, that settles it we'll have them!" George and David were appalled. "What on earth did you pick thistles for??" they asked. "They were free" said Andrew, "and besides, I think they may come in handy one day".

Of course they did come in handy; a Viking trod on one and cried out in pain; alerting the Scots to an attempted invasion just in the nick of time!!

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