

# Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 16 June 2024 - The Third Sunday of Trinity

**Lectionary Readings** (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Ezekiel 17.22-24; Psalm 92. 1-4 and 12-14 [or 1-8]; 2 Corinthians 5.6-10 [11-13] 14-17;  
Mark 4.26-34

## Homily

**Today's homily has been written by the Revd Canon Dr Robert Mackley, Incumbent - Vicar, St Mary the Less, Cambridge**

In the Gospel today Jesus is telling the crowd that have gathered around him what the kingdom of heaven is like. He says that the Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed that someone sows in the field – it is the smallest of the seeds and yet it grows into a great shrub so that when it becomes a tree, birds nest in its branches.

This suggests that the Kingdom of Heaven can start with something very small and vulnerable, and almost invisible, but it has enormous potential for growth and life and eventually becoming a place where people will find their home.

In another part of the Gospel, he gives them another example – the kingdom of heaven is like yeast that you use to knead into the flour when you make bread and, as those of you who are bread-makers know, without the yeast, the bread does not rise and if it doesn't rise it's inedible. The yeast is something that is hidden – you may not know it is there when you look in the bowl and see the flour and the yeast mixed together, but without the yeast, the bread cannot be made.

Jesus seems to be saying that the Kingdom of Heaven is like something that is hidden but it is also always something present and acting upon us and around us if only we could see, and appreciate it – uncover it if you like – and it provides something essential to our lives, enabling us to live lives that are fruitful as we try to draw close to Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of Heaven is something that can be woven into all our lives, so that in all the things we do, all the things we say to people around us at home, at work, in church, everything will be contributing to the building up of the Kingdom of Heaven here and now.

This is something we can recognise from our own experience as being true. From 'small beginnings mighty oaks do grow' we say. We know from what we see every day, that a kind word, a generous gesture, a word of true forgiveness can be a tiny thing in itself – but from such small things, can grow the values of the Kingdom of Heaven; so that what grows are communities that are rooted in love and respect for each other; that are kind and wanting the best for each other; and if called upon to do so, are prepared to be sacrificial for each other.

Jesus is saying that out of the most hidden acts of love the values of Kingdom of Heaven will grow; entwining round all that we do and all that we are.

And that central message, that from tiny vulnerable potential comes growth and life and hope is surely one of the central messages of our faith.

Whenever we witness a baptism, or look at any baby, we are aware of the vulnerability of that child, their utter dependence upon their parents and those that care for them: and, at the same time, we are also conscious of the child's potential – for all that they will grow into, for all that they will do in their own lives. Reflections on childhood vulnerability remind us that, when Jesus was a child, he shared the same vulnerability and dependence as any other infant. And we marvel that God, the creator of the universe, should choose to enter into our humanity in that vulnerability and helplessness.

And why would God do that? The Christian answer to that is this: it is because God always chooses the vulnerable and weak, and powerless to be the places where he will always be present; he chooses to be as tiny as a mustard seed if you like, or as hidden as the yeast in the bowl of flour, yet from that smallness and vulnerability – that hiddenness – comes all the growth and fruitfulness of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In the words of the Magnificat which the clergy promise to say each day at evening prayer:

‘He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent empty away.’

And so, vulnerability and weakness are not things to be feared but embraced. As we grow up and go through our lives, we can often take great steps to hide from others our own vulnerability; lest it be thought by others (or we have to admit to ourselves) that we are not fully in control and at ease with the situation in which we find ourselves; sometimes it seems that our society has a great fear of frailty – that it is thought that somehow frailty and weakness are the worst things that can happen to a human being. But God came to us in frailty and weakness and vulnerability: as St Paul wrote ‘Power is made perfect in weakness’ and so surely for all Christians that means that when we meet those qualities in our neighbour, we recognise that there is a something within them that lies very close to God Himself.

The 20th century priest and writer W.H. Vanstone in his book, *The Stature of Waiting* wrote that ‘The image of God in which man[humanity] is made is the image of THIS God...Man[humanity] is in principle no less ‘god-like’ when he [or she] is waiting upon the world, than when he [or she] is working upon and achieving within the world.’

A person is no less ‘made in this image of God’ when a person is weak or frail and waiting upon the world, than when a person who is at work in busy achievement in the world.

In the debates we hear about assisted dying, those who support this step sometimes seem to think that the very worst thing that can happen to any of us is that we become vulnerable and frail: the unspoken thought is that frailty and utter dependence on others so diminishes our humanity that life is no longer worth very much. But for a Christian surely frailty and weakness and dependence on others does not undermine the divine image which humanity bears: on the contrary, they are the very qualities in which God came to us in the

Incarnation and through which he suffered in his Passion: they are the qualities in which the God of love can always be most clearly seen and met and experienced.

But the parable of the mustard seed speaks to us not just of things hidden and small and vulnerable but also of the potential for growth from that point of weakness: how from that small point comes the potential for growth of the values of the Kingdom all around us so eventually the birds of the air will come to nest in the tree's branches and make their home there. So out of our response to a person's frailty can come reconciliation and understanding; out of small acts of charity and forbearance may grow empathy and tolerance of others; in relationships where there is hardness of heart, out of small acts of kindness and gentleness may grow respect that softens that hardness.

Underpinning all of this of course lies that Christian belief that out of the ultimate weakness and frailty even of death, came the Resurrection. And so, any defeat, any weakness, any death can never be so complete that new life and new hope cannot come forth from it.

And when we think that this is just too much for us to pray for, that this building of the Kingdom in situations of such difficulty is just too much for our puny prayers, we can be reminded of St Paul's words to the Corinthians: 'So', says Paul, 'we are always confident...for we walk by faith, not by sight'.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story/passage is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how \_\_\_\_\_ felt or I wonder how \_\_\_\_\_ felt when \_\_\_\_\_ happened?
- I wonder how you feel about \_\_\_\_\_?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder what the [tree, pearl, coin] could really be?
- I wonder why \_\_\_\_\_ said \_\_\_\_\_?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

### ***Suggested intercessions***

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, hear us as we pray for the Body of your Son, the Church Universal. Bless Dagmar our Acting Bishop and all members of the Body that our faith, like a mustard seed, may grow such that others find rest in its shade. Lord, hear us...

High King of heaven, receive our intercession for your world. Bless Charles our King and every person in authority in every land that they may be open to the coming of your kingdom and seek the peace and justice that belong to it. Lord, hear us...

Gracious God, whose Son has taught us about the kingdom through the example of your creation: hear us as we pray for the natural order; for farmers and all who work in agriculture; for a good harvest and for a better stewardship of the earth that you have entrusted to our hands. Make all of us, we pray, better stewards. Lord, hear us...

O God and Father of Jesus Christ, the suffering servant, we place into his wounded side all who are in need. As he taught us through the mystery of parables, help us to accept the mystery of suffering and grant to all those who are ill or in distress gifts of patience, of faith and of healing. By name we pray for... Lord, hear us...

Blessed Lord, who on the third day, raised your Son in the power of the Spirit, share his resurrection, we pray you, with all the faithful departed, that the kingdom he inaugurated here on earth may come to fruition in them in heaven. Among the recently departed we remember...and...whose anniversaries of death fall at this time. Lord, hear us...

We praise you, Father, that we share the kingdom with all your people, those who have gone before us and those still to come and rejoicing in our fellowship with all your Saints, we pray: **Merciful Father...**

### ***Suggested hymns/songs***

First number from the New English Hymnal; second number from A&M (Standard):

- 353 Dear Lord and Father of mankind
- 341 / 261 Blest are the pure in heart
- 391 / 665 King of glory, King of peace
- 361 Forth in the peace of Christ we go
- 408 / 520 Love divine all loves excelling
- 477 Ye that know the Lord is gracious
- 453 / 542 Stand up! Stand up for Jesus

### **Activities to accompany the service:**

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- [reflectionary.org](http://reflectionary.org) – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](http://engageworship) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material

- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>  
(weekly@lectionary resource)