

**PENTECOST 3B 13062021** *The Reverend Lorna Green*

1 Samuel 15.34- 16.13; Ps 20; 2 Corinthians 5.6-10, 14-17;

Mark 4. 26-34

*Jesus also said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.'* He also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.' With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

Do you know this song by Paul Kelly: "From little things, big things grow"? Keep it in mind because it's relevance will become clear.

We heard in the Old Testament reading that Samuel the prophet was upset because Saul, whom he had anointed King over Israel, was proving to be a less-than-satisfactory king. God sent Samuel off to check out the sons of Jesse, because God had picked one of them to be the replacement king.

There was a sort of parade of sons, which must have confused the young men who had no idea what was going on. Eventually they fetched the youngest boy, David, and God told Samuel "He's the one!" So Samuel anointed him with oil and the Spirit filled David.

He didn't actually become king for some time, because Saul was still very much alive and occupying the throne; but eventually he got there, and became the greatest, most popular and successful king Israel ever had.

Psalm 20 is a song of praise and prayer for the king, maybe like "God save our gracious Queen" for the time.

Then we heard a section from the second letter to the Corinthians, in which Paul reminds us that we walk by faith, not by sight. He tells us that the love of Christ urges us on, because we have been made new. If we believe that Jesus died for all, then we are made a new creation.

Finally we had the reading from Mark's gospel, containing parables about the kingdom of God. What is 'the kingdom of God?' What does Mark mean when he writes about it?

The 'Kingdom of God' is an ancient metaphor that is not easily translated into today's culture. Back in King Saul's day, people understood 'kingdom' as the land and people that the king ruled. At the time when Jesus lived, the kingdom and all the power belonged to Caesar, the Roman Emperor.

When Mark was writing his gospel the early Christians were preaching that Caesar's dominion had been overtaken by the dominion of God. If you were one of those who followed Jesus, you were under his authority; your allegiance was to God, not to Caesar. This was a radical and dangerous stance for people living under occupation.

In our day, kings and queens tend not to be autocratic, absolute rulers with limitless power over their subjects. Some in Australia are keen monarchists while others favour becoming a republic.

We are free to have an opinion and express it publicly if we wish, with a fair amount of certainty that we won't be arrested for treason.

So while Mark's first readers had a clear idea of what he meant by 'kingdom', present-day readers have less certainty. As Australians we live in a constitutional monarchy, which means that the powers of the Queen have been delegated by the Australian Constitution to her representative in Australia, the Governor-General.

Absolute monarchy is a form in which the king or queen holds supreme autocratic authority, principally not being restricted by written laws, legislature, or unwritten customs. This is the kind of monarchy that was common throughout history and what the people of Israel asked for and expected when they demanded a king.

The two parables in today's Gospel reading are about God's kingdom. In the first, it is likened to the mysterious growth of plants from seed that has been scattered on the ground. The gardener sows the seed, and then just waits, and the plant grows by itself.

The second parable, about mustard seeds, always reminds me of that song "From little things, big things grow".

Mustard seeds are small- many seeds are even smaller- but mustard bushes can be prolific and invasive, taking over the garden if you're not careful.

Both of these parables are about God's grace. They are not about us or what we do, but about what God does. We might plant a seed or two, but it is God who gives the growth.

How do these parables explain God's kingdom to us?

The seed is an important image, a symbol of life growing out of what is small and looks dead. So God's kingdom in a particular place or time may look small or dying, or even dead; but God creates great things from the smallest, most insignificant beginnings.

Looking back to the other Bible readings, we can see that David started life as an insignificant youngest son whose job was looking after animals. He became Israel's greatest King; and Jesus was descended from his family. From little things, big things grow....

St Paul reminds us of the transformation God works in us during our journey of faith. Just as God gives growth to the seed while the farmer sleeps, so God transforms us by the spirit even as we struggle to live out our lives as Christians. We are a new creation!

Every single one of us has a vital place in God's Kingdom- a kingdom defined by love, connection, relationship, peace-making, loving service, inclusion, acceptance, and joyful worship. Nobody is insignificant or unimportant, or of lesser value than anybody else.

You may think it doesn't matter if you're not at church because no-one will miss you; that you have nothing to contribute or nothing to say at the Annual Meeting; that you are not important enough to make any difference. That is not true. You are a new creation, as is everyone here- loved by God, made in God's image, and of infinite value.

We sow seeds of the kingdom every time we offer the love of Jesus to another person, every time we show compassion and welcome and support to another, every time we stand against the prevailing culture of greed and self-centredness.

We may feel small and insignificant, as individuals, as a parish, as a church; but feelings are not facts. The fact is that God, the creator of all that is, ever has been and ever will be, the almighty and eternal God is on our side. We can do all things through God who strengthens us.

So let's get about the business of sowing seeds, trusting God to grow great things from our little beginnings.

The Lord be with you.