

## Sermon 18 August 2019 'Sowing seeds.'

### Mark 4:26-34

I was moved to make 'Sowing Seeds' the theme of today's service having received last week a memory stick from John McClean, the architect of our new church. This memory stick contains a walk-through of our new church and it will be showing in the hall during morning tea after our service. The reason for today's theme will become apparent over the next 15 minutes.

First of all, let us have a look at our Gospel reading. Not for the first time, Jesus uses an agricultural metaphor to describe the Kingdom of God. Actually, Jesus almost always used rural metaphors to make a wide variety of points. He did this because Palestine was a rural society and so his listeners would relate to the picture he was painting.

In his first illustration, he compares the kingdom of God with a farmer who plants seed, gets on with his everyday living and in the meantime the seeds sprout and grow into crops. A couple of points to make about this illustration. Firstly, the seed takes weeks to germinate and then weeks to grow to fruition. It is a slow process. In the same way, the Kingdom of God doesn't just happen overnight, and it takes a lot of work, a lot of effort, and a fair degree of sacrifice.

Secondly, there is certainly an element of faith here. We plant seeds in good faith, believing that nature will take its course, that they will sprout and grow into the plant or bush that we expect. In a similar way, the Kingdom of God materializes because of faith – faith in what we are doing and faith in God.

Now let's look at the second illustration, the metaphor of the mustard seed. A mustard seed is about as small as you can get. In Palestine a mustard seed grew into something very like a tree. The point here is that even a small amount of faith is enough for the beginnings of the development of God's kingdom.

Also, in the Old Testament one of the commonest ways to describe a great empire was to describe it as a tree, and the tribes or nations within it were like birds finding shelter within its branches. *Ezekiel 17:22-23* The tree in this parable is the empire of the Church, the birds representing all the nations gathered together in the Church. So perhaps you can begin to see why I have chosen this particular reading as we look ahead to our new church.

I think we need to take a moment just to remind ourselves what we mean by God's Kingdom, and especially in the context of our new church. To put it simply, God's Kingdom is a community where people live in harmony with God's will, caring for one another, loving one another. What does that mean for our church? It means that as a church we should be striving to create a community that does simply that. But remember this, a church is made up of individual people, and it is those individual people, you and me, who will, in the end, determine whether that caring and loving community is created.

Just recently, someone I know very well, told me she was disillusioned with the company she works for. She said that when she joined she wanted to make a difference. By that she meant to those she worked with and so in her own small way she would be contributing to the culture of the company in a positive way. However, due to one or two factors, she feels she hasn't been able to make a difference so she is re-evaluating her place with the company. As I listened to her, I couldn't help feeling that she had hit the nail right on its proverbial head. She wanted to make a difference, and the point is this, if everyone else felt the same way as her, then you can put your money on it, a difference would be made.

My dream is that our new church will make a difference in our growing community, but it will mean that we all need to own that dream and be prepared to do our little bit. None of us can do it on our own – I certainly can't. Our contribution is like a small seed – it might not seem very much but when we all plant our little seeds, the resulting crop will be extremely productive.

Some of you may remember Rob Harley who was a TV documentary maker of some note some years ago, including the well-known series, 'Extreme Close-up.' He is also a person with a strong faith. He tells the story of an occasion when he was finishing up a filming assignment for the aid agency, Opportunity International in Ghana.

They had spent most of their time filming around a town in the interior called Kumasi. They were assigned a driver, a local young man called Daniel. Rob Harley was very interested in him because on every one of the four days he was with him, he has always looked immaculate in the African heat, neatly pressed clean clothes in stark contrast to Rob Harley's scruffy appearance. He was even more impressed when on the last day of filming they stopped by his house. It could only be described as a shack.

But Daniel had more surprises in store. Rob Harley asked him how many brothers and sister she had and Daniel replied, '29, but of course my dad does have 8 wives. However, he has recently become a Christian so now he is cutting down – to just 4 wives.' Highly commendable, Rob Harley thought, but he did spare a thought for the 4 wives who were now

cast out on to the street.

It turns out that Daniel, at 22, is the youngest of the 30 children. Rob Harley asked him if hoped to progress from working in quite a lowly position in the local aid agency office to perhaps making manager one day. Daniel replied, 'Oh no, I've saved enough money and in a few months I am going to a college in America where I am going to get my masters, and ultimately I am going to establish and head up a brand new aid organisation to bring dignity, jobs and help to people all across Africa.'

Rob Harley's head was reeling: not only does child no. 30 not feel sorry for himself, he appears from his little shack every morning, beautifully turned out and greets the day with, 'World, bring it on! I am going to make a difference.'

Now that is attitude! We can all make a difference in our own small way. We can all sow our little seed and between us all we can create a corner of God's Kingdom here in Flat Bush. Our little seeds will grow into a bountiful crop and then our new church will be like a large combine harvester, harvesting the produce from those seeds.

Reverend Warner Wilder