**Pentecost 3B Mark 4:26-34 13 June 2021**

**Video Link:** [**https://youtu.be/J6mstfBSeYw**](https://youtu.be/J6mstfBSeYw)

At the end of my first year in seminary, I had a crisis of faith and for a time I wasn’t sure if I believed in God. One thing I had learnt in my first year of studies was that faith is created and sustained through God’s Word and Sacraments. I decided to test this by continuing to go to worship to hear God’s word and receive Holy Communion, even though I wasn’t sure I still believed in God. I continued to read the Bible and went back to seminary on a reduced subject load.

For the next few months as I continued to attend worship, slowly the seed of God’s Word took root and grew until finally one day I realised that God had revived faith in my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Shortly after this, I made the hard decision, with Caryn’s support, to sell our business so that I could fully concentrate on my seminary studies.

Today we heard Jesus tell two parables about the kingdom of God growing from tiny seeds.

These are not the first parables about seeds in Mark’s gospel. Earlier in chapter 4, Jesus talks about the kingdom of God being like a farmer scattering seed on several different types of ground. Some fell on a path, some on rocky ground, some among thorns and some on good soil. Later when Jesus explained the meaning of the parable, he revealed that the parable showed why not everyone comes to faith and why some who come to faith in Christ eventually fall away. Jesus also says, “Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word.” Mark 4:13. The seed is the word of God, this is a key to understanding the two parables we hear today.

In the first parable we heard today, Jesus says, “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.” Sometimes there is a tendency for us to believe that we can bring other people to faith in God by our own effort and persuasion. We certainly have been given the task of sowing the seed. We have the job of telling people the good news of Jesus Christ, but the parable is telling us that we must leave it up to God’s word to do its work. We do not know how or when that seed will grow, and in whose heart it will sprout and take root. For this reason, we should never make assumptions about who will come to faith. This parable reminds us to continue to do our job of scattering the word of God wherever and whenever the opportunity arises, leaving it up to God to provide the conditions for it to grow into faith.

In the same way that we can become disillusioned about individuals who don’t seem to believe in Christ even after decades, we can also become disillusioned about the church, which seems to be shrinking daily.

This is where the second parable we heard today can and does give us hope. The second parable looks at a different aspect of the kingdom of God. Here Jesus says the kingdom, “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 birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” Mark 4:30-32.

The kingdom of God on earth, namely the church, is like a mustard bush. Mustard bushes are hardy plants, that can germinate and grow in the harshest of environments. In the same way, the church can also germinate and grow in the harshest of environments. The first century was a harsh environment for the church, yet wherever the word of God was planted congregations germinated and grew. For the last two thousand years congregations have continued to germinate and grow. Often in very harsh environments.

 In Australia, the environment has become much harsher. Not so long ago the church held a high place in our society. Churches were the cedars that people looked up to, but now when many people look at the church all they see is a scaggy bush. A weed to be removed. This should not surprise us, because Jesus himself said the kingdom is like a mustard bush, and mustard bushes look quite scraggy. Mustard bushes aren’t like stately looking cedars, but they will grow almost anywhere. In some places, mustard bushes grow so readily that they are regarded as weeds, and we all know how pervasive and hardy weeds can be.

The environment for the church may be much harsher than it was only a couple of decades ago, but that does not mean we should give up hope. Instead, we should keep on doing our job of planting the word. It may seem like a small thing to plant the word. Yet we can trust that the Holy Spirit will grow that word in people’s hearts, bring them to faith and into a relationship with God. The Spirit will continue to gather people of faith into communities. On the outside, they may look unimpressive, like a mustard bush, but like a mustard bush, they will be strong and resilient.

The good thing is that whenever and wherever the church sprouts and grows, it will do its important work. Jesus reminds us that the mustard bush is a place of refuge for the birds of the air. A place of safety and protection provided by God.In the same way, the church, God’s kingdom on earth is a place of refuge for all people. It isn’t perfect, but it is a place where people can experience love, compassion and grace. A place where God is present forgiving us and affirming his loving relationship with us. A place where God is feeding us with his life-giving word and the body and blood Christ. A place where through word and sacrament the Holy Spirit grows faith in our hearts and where Jesus promises to always be among us.

Amen.

Pastor Rolf Lungwitz