

# The Kingdom of Heaven is Coming ...

## *... the Ordinary must See*

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*A sermon given on the Seventh Sunday of Trinity, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2020, by the Curate, the Revd Tim Kelly in the second post-lockdown attended and recorded service in the Minster.*

*Matthew 13.31-33, 44-52*

*“The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hurries to the place where it rises. The wind blows to the south and goes round to the north; round and round goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns ... All things are wearisome; more than one can express ... What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun.”*

Have you ever felt like this? One of those days. All things are wearisome. May be this is how you've felt some of the time during lockdown? Or you switch on the news only to feel “round and round goes the wind ... there is nothing new under the sun”. Perhaps you recognise some of these words. They are from the opening of the book of Ecclesiastes, Chapter 1, sometimes titled, “Reflections of a Royal Philosopher”. Although it's a little depressing, I'm often grateful that there are bits of the bible like this. It reflects all human emotions, not just the happy and positive ones. It has the potential to meet you in whatever emotional state you may be in. The first parable from today's gospel reading – the parable of the mustard seed – is potentially also one of these cases.

Consider for a moment the backdrop to today's reading. Jesus, with his band of disciples, has been proclaiming “The Kingdom of Heaven is near”. They've been travelling and spreading this – the good news – to whoever had ears to hear. But this may have been hard to understand for those listening. The Jews believe that there would be time when the Kingdom of Heaven – the Kingdom of God would be restored, but specifically that it would be an *almighty* day of reckoning. But what was this that Jesus proclaimed? – the Kingdom of heaven is *near*? A kingdom that has not yet arrived, but is somehow close at hand, somehow arriving. Where are the lightning bolts? Where is the thunder? Where was the cataclysmic ending to all injustice and evil? To those listening to Jesus looking all around them, the world perhaps still seemed very *ordinary*, very *normal*, perhaps – dare I say it ... boring! *The wind blows to the south and goes round to the north; round and round goes the wind.* Although, those following Jesus could see truth, love and justice in

what Jesus was saying they may very well have been wondering how could things possibly transform from *this* reality, from *this* place, from *this* present time to the promised Kingdom of God? It may have simply seemed *impossible*. If that was how they were feeling, there are certainly times when I can relate to this, maybe you can too. You look at the world around you, the problems faced in our society, in this country and others and you can easily think “How are we ever going to get from here to there. How is this all going to be transformed?” It may be that we see *glimmers* of the Kingdom but we can also easily feel overwhelmed at how far the world has yet to travel.

It struck me that this may be one of the feelings at the moment in the middle of the pandemic we face. We have glimmers of a positive future, little signs of normality returning that give us hope, but then we may metaphorically sink back into our seats again and feel overwhelmed by the mountain that still is ahead of us to climb. ... *All things are wearisome; more than one can express ...*

Into this situation, Jesus gives us this picture of a mustard seed.

Mustard seeds are tiny, yes, but they're also quite *ordinary*. The mustard plant is an annual herb. You may have heard, or possibly have even seen, that mustard plants can grow to a size that, relative to the smallness of the seed, is quite impressive – possibly 2ft to 6ft, or in extreme cases 9 to 10ft. However, today rather than focusing on its size I want to point out something quite different. The mustard plant is just that ... a plant! It's *not* a tree of any kind. So why does Jesus say that it becomes a tree? Some have pointed that Jesus' description of a tree symbolises the *imperial* tree found in the representation of empires, including in the Old Testament when it talks of the Kingdom of God. As Psalm 104, says “The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.”

So rather than this simply being a tale of a small thing growing into a big thing, talking about enlargement or *amplification*, this parable talks of powerful *transformation* from the ordinary into something different, something extraordinary. From the everyday to the royal. I found great encouragement from this. It gave me *hope*, as I hope it does for you too. When I consider our present time, our present place and circumstances the individual actions that we each can take on a day-to-day may seem oh so very *ordinary*, possibly even mundane. But out of these ordinary actions – whether that may be a simple act of service or kindness (that we would dismiss as being ‘nothing really’), or talking openly about our own faith, or encouraging others) – out of these ordinary actions something

*extraordinary* can and does emerge. Jesus is not *just* pointing out that the kingdom of God will grow. He's pointing out that the kingdom will grow *in ways we don't anticipate and expect*. Our own contribution and our own faith may sometimes feel as small as a mustard seed, a mere 'drop in the ocean', and the way ahead appear daunting, uncertain and unclear. However, we can take hope: Transformation is coming.

Now I can even fail to transform a tomato plant seedling into a grown tomato plant, let alone transform a tomato plant into an oak tree. Such a transformation would require more than simply an improvement in my gardening skills. So, finally, we're reminded by the *supernatural* nature of the transformation described in Jesus' parable that, the Kingdom grows not through *our* might and strength, but through God's power working in the world, in and through us. As it says in 2 Chronicles 20:15 "Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the battle is not *yours*, but God's."

So today, if you're feeling as weary as King Solomon in the beginning of the book of Ecclesiastes and, in his words, "there's nothing new under the sun", take heart! The transforming Kingdom of God is coming. The ordinary mustard seed can become the royal tree. God can and will take our ordinary and the everyday and produce the extraordinary.

# Reading Text

Matthew 13.31-33, 44-52

<sup>31</sup> He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; <sup>32</sup> it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.' <sup>33</sup> He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'

<sup>44</sup> 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. <sup>45</sup> 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; <sup>46</sup> on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. <sup>47</sup> 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; <sup>48</sup> when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. <sup>49</sup> So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous <sup>50</sup> and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>51</sup> 'Have you understood all this?' They answered, 'Yes.' <sup>52</sup> And he said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.'