Matthew 13 31-33 and 44-52

Well the Monty Don gardening section of Matthew’s Gospel continues into today, however today we are entering into a fresh set of concepts and ideas

Today the writer of Matthew is being to open up a discussion on what the Kingdom of heaven is. Again, the writer is using common themes to illustrate the mysteries of God. Today we are considering two of a collection of parables about the Kingdom of heaven. Most theologians agree that there are five definite parables exploring the notions of the Kingdom in this section, but others suggest that verses 51-52 might be a sixth parable (answers on a post card).

Each of these parables highlights a different perspective of what the Gospel writer wanted people to understand about the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, they are each snap shots taken from a different perspective, a bit like if we were all the recall the Queen’s sliver jubilee, same event, different perspectives and understandings, no single picture is definitive, but each provides a glimpse that adds to our understanding.

One of the things we need to note is that in the parables the Kingdom of God is something that is happening now, a process of change that is underway.

 There seems to be natural pairings among these parables:

• The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the parable of the Leaven. Both look at the idea that from small and humble beginnings great things grow. The parables emphasise the power of God’s action. Both parables were preached to the crowds. Rousing addresses to the masses to encourage growth.

• The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the parable of the Pearl have to do with objects of great value and the great commitment it takes to possess them. These were addressed to the disciples. Recognition and warning of the potential cost for the disciples and those who follow

• The Parable of the Net and the Parable of the Weeds (vv. 24-30—last week’s Gospel reading) speak to us of the present openness of the kingdom to all who would enter, but also discuss the notions of division too.

The lectionary for today takes two of these parable sets, the first about growth and the second about commitment.

Growth and commitment

In verses 31-33 the writer of Matthew speaks of the mustard seed and leaven, both incredibly small things, but both have marked effects. The writer if Matthew tells us that the mustard seed grows into a huge tree in which the bird’s nest and leaven when added to the right ingredients causes bread to rise and form.

Small things with huge effect, insignificant things in the eye of many but in the right setting cause huge change

What could be less significant than – a seed, some yeast, the birth of a child in a cave, son of a carpenter, a rag tag band of tax collectors, fishermen, the execution on a cross of 33-year-old Nazarene rabbi freedom fighter.

or

30 people gathering in Kingston, a Zoom Diddy Disciples meeting, an average preacher preaching the average sermon in a typical parish —or a loaf of bread and a cup of wine?

But within these small things the kingdom of God is seen and heard, we can never tell how God will use these small things to change the world.

Like the leaven and the mustard seed God provides the starting point, the seed and the leaven, the life and death of Christ- but the Church, the people, us, need to provide the ingredients where the seed and the leaven can grow, where the life and love of Christ can grow

The mustard seed is tiny, the leaven in a loaf of bread is tiny compared to the other ingredients, from small beginnings, such as one man and 12 disciples walking from town to town proclaiming that God is love and those who live in love live in God and God in them, GREAT THINGS HAPPEN!!!!

In all honesty the writer of Matthew was slightly over egging the cake when he describes the mustard plant as a tree. Truth is its more like a large shrub typically tops out at 8 to 12 feet— not like the mighty oak of Mamre under which Abraham and Sarah found shelter from the midday heat.

So the questions has to be asked- Why would Jesus not compare the kingdom of heaven to a great tree instead of a shrub? If he is contrasting a small seed with a great tree, a mighty oak?

Maybe Jesus was suggesting that his kingdom would grow beyond its small beginnings, but yet it would still be found in modest form.

Maybe the Kingdom is found in the small communities of faith, the humble parish churches where 30 people gathering in Kingston, Diddy Disciples meet via Zoom, with an average preacher preaching the average sermon and where bread and a cup of wine become the Body and Blood of Christ.

The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven hopefully will encourage us to be faithful and patience. Gardening and bread making are 2 things that I really enjoy.

But both require a degree of faith and a lot of patience. Faith that the bread will rise, and patience to leave it alone to do so, faith that the seeds planted will grow and again patience to let them grow.

I would often like God to sweep through the world like a conquering hero, to fill our Church, to rise up and bring about justice, mercy, love, equality and peace, to be the God of the Earthquake, Wind and Fire but actually its more likely he will be found as a still small voice of calm, growing people in faith and love, nurturing the mustard seeds and leaven in our lives.

We must take heart that actually we are like the mustard plant, growing the kingdom of God here and now and like the Leaven we are a transforming presence in Kingston.

The second set of parables are both parables that highlight discovery, joy, and action.

Stories of finding things of great value, for one actively searching and the other stumbling across, but both, however, identify the value to their finds and go on to sell everything so that they might buy it.

They act with haste and joy, both sell everything to possess the treasure they have found, they do this was glad hearts.

The people in the parables are like the disciples, who left everything to follow Jesus.

Leaving behind the past treasures of life to gain their hearts desire.

Leaving behind old ways, old understandings, old habits and moving on to poses the great treasure that they have found

Obviously the parables are metaphors for people finding the love of God, some like the seeker of the pearl, by diligently searching (process evangelism) and others like the man in the field who just happen upon it, (occasional office). The finding was one thing, but the important thing was the realisation that they had something wonderful, something worth more than everything else.

Maybe God is telling us that whilst we are not a great cathedral Church, or a massive hyper Church, we are in our own way, like a mustard plant, growing the Kingdom of God in this place. We are the leaven in our society that is having a transforming effect on the world around us.

Maybe we are like the finder of the pearl, here today to actively seeking God’s love, God’s will, Gods acceptance, or maybe like the person stumbling over treasure, we are here, well just because, either way it’s good to be here as it’s here that the pearls and treasure might be found.

The pearls and treasure of our discipleship, the calling of God inviting us into a deeper relationship, a new ministry, a vocation.