**Sermon Sunday 13th June 2021**

Good morning

The first couple of slides you see this morning are from our garden.

A confession to start - I am not a gardener – perhaps not completely accurate - I have been known to occasionally cut the grass, do some weeding and pruning and scoop up the leaves when Autumn comes – a job I find strangely satisfying but I am not a grower. I know the sort of plants that I like and am happy to pick them out at a garden centre or nursery but that’s about it. I am quite in awe of people who can name plants, flowers and trees just by looking at them, especially if they know the Latin names too!

Today’s Gospel reading from Mark 4, a chapter full of parables, follows the parables of the seed falling on different types of ground, the lamp on the stand and here we have another two.

Both parables talk about seeds and growth and explicitly reference the Kingdom of God. Interestingly the first parable of the Growing Seed is only found in Mark’s Gospel. There are different explanations for this but that is for another day.

At face value the parable of the growing seed doesn’t appear to be a remarkable story. A farmer sowed his field, went away and as time passed the seeds grew without the farmer’s intervention– sounds like my type of gardening! The soil and nature did it’s job – the leaf grew, the heads of wheat were formed and the crop could be harvested.

Each summer when my brother and I were children we were given sweet pea seeds to plant and after planting, every day for about a week, we would wake up and run out to see whose seeds had started to grow.

When I first read these verses I wondered what the famer does once the seeds have been planted – stay awake watching and waiting for the first shoots to appear but no, we are told he just carries on with day to day life hoping for success. The seed will grow as long as it is nourished by the soil, watered by the rain and warmed by the sun. The growth of the seeds will follow the pattern of the seasons, just as night follows day.

The parable of the seeds falling on different grounds at the start of Mark’s Gospel is about our own preparation. Christ was making it clear to the disciples that not all hearts are open and willing to receive God’s message. In order for the seed to bear fruit it has to land in a soil that is well prepared to receive it.

In this parable Jesus is talking about the process that the message of God’s love for us undergoes when we are willing to listen to it. Very few people will have a road to Damascus moment when suddenly their eyes are open and they come to know God’s love through Jesus Christ.

Christ draws specific attention to the farmer leaving the seed to do its work with implicit confidence that there will be a harvest. The farmer trusts that this will happen even when he doesn’t understand what is happening underground.

Often a life lived with Christ develops in a slow and sometimes uneven way and this is all part of the mystery of faith. If we reflect as individuals some of us will see ourselves as seeds, some leaves and some heads of corn. Whatever stage we may think we are at we are in God’s hands – watched over by a protector and guide who knows us, loves us and is a constant in our lives, whether we always acknowledge it or not*.*

The second parable is about the mustard seed. Research tells me that a mustard seed is very small (not the smallest in the world) but still only about 1-2mm in size and yet the plant that comes from that seed can grow up to between 5 – 6.5 feet tall and trees significantly larger – quite an achievement from something so little.

As the gospel tells us it becomes one of the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that birds can perch in it’s shade. You can see from the picture that there is plenty of room for birds in the branches.

This reference to birds echoes images in both Ezekiel and Daniel.

So what is the significance of both of these parables in relation to God’s kingdom and how does it apply to us today?

The first parable teaches us that Jesus ministry in Galilee doesn’t look like the Kingdom of God that people were expecting – it was seedtime for God’s Kingdom and the promised and long-awaited harvest was yet to come. People would not be able to see how the harvest would come but it would, slowly and without fanfare or ceremony.

Jesus’ ministry began with a limited number of followers, a small and slow start from a man born into the humblest of circumstances, in a stable to a young girl. It is also a warning to never underestimate the potential of something starting from a very small beginning.

Take a minute and think of a time when someone has interacted with you, you’ve watched or heard something and it has stuck in your head, enough that you want to find out more and it comes back to remind you at the oddest part of the day or night…

The seed is within each of you to know God’s love through the life of his son Jesus Christ. The seed grows as the life is already inside it. Just like the seed relies on the earth to make it grow so we as Christians rely on God and the Holy Sprit to refresh and encourage us. To do this we need to nurture ourselves spiritually – to pray, to read our Bibles, join a house group, take part in a community project. Show the world that through the love of Christ we care. Not only this but in our daily interactions with people our behaviour and words should reflect that we have Christ in our hearts and minds. This doesn’t have to be a grand gesture – a gentle touch, a simple smile, an extra minute to listen. If the pandemic has taught us anything it is that the simplest gestures are the ones that matter most. Every day, each one of us has the power to make a difference, is given countless opportunities to plant the seed of God’s love in someone else’s life.

The life of faith is a life lived trusting in Jesus Christ.

Why don’t we use this week as an opportunity to be sowers of God’s word – to take a small seed and plant it in the hearts and minds of those we encounter. It may not always bear fruit straight away – it may be a slow process but if we put our trust in God he will do the rest.

As Jesus has taught us, from the tiniest seed can come the largest plant, enough to provide shelter in all the world. Why don’t we make every effort to realise that in our world today?

Let us pray:

Father God, in all that we say and do fill us with your grace. Give us courage to plant the seeds of your love in the hearts of those who do not know you and renew the dormant seeds in those who have forgotten you.

Filled with the love of your son Jesus Christ and the blessings of the Holy Spirit, fill us with the confidence that you have a plan and purpose for our lives to bear fruit for your Kingdom.

Amen