

Sheffield United Reformed Churches
Team Ministry an act of devotion for individual or families
Sunday 13th June 2021 at 10:30 am

Call to Worship

For your love that never changes, **we praise you, O God.**

For the miracle of growth, **we praise you, O God.**

For stories that tell of your love, **we praise you, O God. We come now to worship**

Opening Hymn R&S 45

Morning has broken like the first morning - Blackbird has spoken like the first bird
Praise for the singing, praise for the morning - Praise for them springing fresh from the Word

Sweet the rain's new fall, sunlit from Heaven - Like the first dewfall on the first grass
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden - Sprung in completeness where His feet pass

Mine is the sunlight, mine is the morning - Born of the one light, Eden saw play
Praise with elation, praise every morning: God's recreation of the new day!

Opening Prayers

As we come to prayers this morning, imagine you are holding a seed in the palm of your hand. If you planted that seed what would you like it to grow into...?

We come in prayer to give thanks and praise for the enduring work of all the apostles, who have built the foundation on which we stand today, through the generations. The Gospel is still being proclaimed, still creating hope and joy and inspiring us to give praise and thanks.

Living God, in our desire for meaning and purpose in life, you remind us that you are here in our hour of need.

As we reach out in our times of searching, you promise us that you will listen and answer beyond our imaginings.

When we place our trust in our human enterprises, you call us back to your holy place, to meet with you, and to rest in your presence.

Forgive us for putting our trust in the things of the world. When others look for success in their earthly aspects of life, let us put our trust in your ways. When the world builds success on power and control, let us believe in your ways of building a kingdom of righteousness and love. When we fall short of all you expect of us, let us hold to your promise that you will pick us up again, and set out feet on your path once more.

We thank you, God for the message of your forgiving love and we humbly accept your forgiveness and we commit this time and our lives to you, as your children. Hear our prayer as we receive the Holy Spirit, in whom we encounter you anew. **Amen**

Readings



Psalm 20 - Give victory to the king, O LORD; answer us when we call.

Mark 4:26 – 34- "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground,

2 Corinthians 5:14-17 -So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:

Reflection

Our Gospel reading this morning compose of two separate parables which Jesus uses them as an example to say what the kingdom is like. A seed once planted is a mystery being revealed. It unfolds by its own operation in the soil. Those who plant the seed may sleep and rise, but a seed's work is automatic and it come up when it is ready.

Any farmer in Jesus' audience who puzzled at the deceptive simplicity of the first parable would be left shaking their head at the second (4:30-32). Jesus talks about the mustard seed and cedars of Lebanon. The cedars of Lebanon the most majestic tree does not have to be imported from far away, it is found in just in our back yard. The mustard is indeed an herb with medicinal properties and one that is useful for flavouring and preserving food. The mustard bush, though, is a garden pest. No one would sow it on purpose.

Before we look more deeply at the hidden meaning there are two things which I would like to draw your attention to. I think you already know them but maybe not in relation to this parable. The two things are -: God makes things grow and size does matter.

The mustard shrub grows all too readily on its own, and once it appears, it takes over the field. It can grow dense, but it is hardly magnificent. The proverbial mustard seed may have been chosen because it was well known that it is not the smallest seed, nor is the mustard bush the largest of all shrubs. Exaggeration follows absurdity.

Jesus must have had a smile on his face as he spoke to the crowd. Here Jesus shows he has a sense of humour. Jesus could have likened God's reign to the cedars of Lebanon if he wanted to describe an in-breaking state of affairs that would cause people to drop everything and be impressed (read Ezekiel 17:22-24). Instead he describes something more ordinary, and yet also something more able to show up, to take over inch by inch, and eventually to transform a whole landscape.

He is not aiming to impart insights about the relative worth of shrubberies but to shock people into a new way of perceiving greatness. It is about small being the largest, being able to transform and the first being the last. God makes things grow and size does matter.

For the community in Mark's, time it would have been good news to people aware of the small beginnings of Jesus' ministry or of their own struggling community. But they may not have made the connection. If they looked closer at what the shrub does, it may have provided a clue, about the ministry of Jesus. We are told that Jesus spoke in parables as he wanted his audience to reflect and to think about what they have head. We are also told that later on he would explain it in more details for the disciples.

For us today, if we are thinking that we are small and have nothing much to share. I say just think of the mustard seed. If we are concerned that our buildings are still closed and there are people needing to hear the good news of Christ. Just think of the mustard seed. We look around and our congregations are shrinking, there are few young people and there is a gaping hole between the 60 year old and the 20 year old.

So what can we hear a new from the parable for us today? The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, it starts small and spreads like a weed. You can't keep it under control and where structures are put in place to keep it in check, it will break free. Let us plant the seed of the Gospel and let God miraculous presence make it grow. There is possibility for growth and growth which bears fruit. Remember being connected to the vine

The image of the shrub that is so large birds can find shelter under its branches lifts this parable from garden satire to a vision of the end-time. In Ezekiel 17:22-24, God plants a tiny cedar twig on a high mountain of Israel and that twig becomes a large and fruitful tree under whose branches every kind of bird will find shelter.

The birds there symbolize the nations that flock to God on the glorious day of the Lord. Better be careful what you pray for when you say, "Your kingdom come..." This is the day when all God's people will meet as one. There something here about "being buried in Christ" that could be touched on ... But, more generally, there is much that can be made of the metaphor of the "small having a great potential" – and maybe it doesn't need me to spell that out!

Those of us who sow the seed must not become discouraged when there seems to be so little progress in the lives of those who have received the gospel into their heart. We were not born full grown adults, and God is still at work. Our faith, which begins as small as a mustard seed is capable of the same phenomenal growth as is demonstrated in the life of the church back then and although our context is so very different, there is always room for growth. But in order to grow we need to plant!

Let us as church conduct our ministry, of the mustard seed and if we don't provide sanctuary, hospitality, sustenance, speak out against injustice and renewal to those who need it, like little birds in a field full of foxes, then it isn't the gospel. In short, there is no gospel in which Jesus remains buried in the ground like a dormant seed, because in God there is growth and as we consider going back into our buildings may we see the potential for renewed life in Christ. Amen

Song for Reflection - see: [Beautiful Things \[Live\] - YouTube](#)

All this pain, I wonder if I'll ever find my way
I wonder if my life could really change at all
All this earth, could all that is lost ever be found?
Could a garden come up from this ground at all?

You make beautiful things - You make beautiful things out of the dust
You make beautiful things - You make beautiful things out of us

All around, Hope is springing up from this old ground
Out of chaos life is being found in You

You make beautiful things - You make beautiful things out of the dust
You make beautiful things - You make beautiful things out of us

Yes you do - Thank you Lord, thank you Lord!

You make me new, You are making me new
You make me new, You are making me new

You make beautiful things - You make beautiful things out of the dust
You make beautiful things - You make beautiful things out of us

Prayers of Intercession

Lord, we thank you for your ongoing love for us. Like trees stretching up to the sun we want to grow upwards towards you. We bring the people of your world before you and pray for those who do not find their security in you. We ask that where there is oppression, persecution, injustices and war that they may cease. We remember, Israel / Palestine, Mexico, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo.

We pray for churches, all across the world. We thank you that the church is still growing. We think of areas where the church is being persecuted, we remember China, Eritrea, North Korea. We pray for our environment. We say we are sorry and ask for your mercy

We pray for people who serve in community and nation, those who walk in the corridors of responsibility and sit in the chambers of decision-making; for those who stand tall for what is right; for those who give of themselves for the benefit of others ... that they may always place the greater good above the love of self. We remember the members of the G7 meeting.

We pray for all in need, broken or ill at ease in body, mind or spirit. We ask for healing, comfort and strength for those who are afraid

We ask that our lives will be a place where prayer is an everyday occurrence, a place that is as your kingdom is in the midst of us, ever constant, ever changing, ever open, ever inclusive, ever a place of life and love and where God's love will continue to grow. Help us to support each other, and keep us faithful in our lives for you. Plant your love in us, like the mustard seed, make your Spirit ours and from these small beginnings let our praise increase, so the world can see your joy, your light and your peace...

We say together the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples: *Our Father...*

Closing Hymn R&S 200

The kingdom of God is justice and joy; For Jesus restores what sin would destroy.
God's power and glory in Jesus we know; and here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.

The kingdom of God is mercy and grace; The captives are freed, the sinners find place,
The outcast are welcomed God's banquet to share;
And hope is awakened in place of despair.

The kingdom of God is challenge and choice: Believe the good news, repent and rejoice!
God's love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross:
Our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.

God's kingdom is come, the gift and the goal; In Jesus begun, in heaven made whole.
The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call; and all things cry "Glory!" to God all in all.

Blessing

May God's blessing hold our community.
May Jesus' grace shape our community.
And may the Spirit's challenge,
To grow and the spread the good news
Beyond our community
Be our future.

Help us to remain in Christ, wherever we go;
In whatever situation we find ourselves;
Bearing fruit of love and truth,
Doing justice in all our ways
For your name sake.

And the grace of God be with us all...