

MUSTARD SEEDS – REV'D CATHERINE EATON - SUNDAY 14TH JUNE 2009

Readings: 1 Sam 15.34 – 16.13, Ps 20, 2 Cor 5.6-10, 14-17, Mark 4.26-34

I have a mustard seed, several in fact – so tiny and so improbable, mustard seeds, so easily lost or forgotten, overlooked or trodden on.

We all have mustard seeds hidden away in our hearts, entrusted to us by God to be planted somewhere, but so often forgotten or never recognised - seeds of a dream, seeds of love, seeds of hope, of peace and joy, seeds that need to be sown in someone else's life, or seeds that need to be sown in our own, seeds of new life, seeds of reconciliation and forgiveness, seeds of something beautiful, seeds of a poem or a song which needs to come to life ...little mustard seeds, seeds of the Kingdom of God entrusted to us.

Perhaps there's something you must do – some relationship you need to heal, somewhere you need to go, some gift you need to offer. Perhaps there's some cause you need to stand behind, some wrong you need to right. Perhaps there's a light in you that needs to shine in someone else's heart. Perhaps you need to speak of Christ, perhaps you need to pray. Perhaps you need to speak a word of hope, or simply sit with grandchild on your knee.

All of us have seeds of the Kingdom of God hidden in us, but we need to listen to our hearts if we are to recognise them and sow them in the soil of life around us.

We often know these seeds as longing, however faint, for something else, something that awakens energy in us – but too often hidden away like the young David with his sheep, while the older brothers, the ones most likely, stood to the fore. But it was the small one, the hidden one who held the Kingdom potential. For God is not like us. God doesn't look on outward appearances, but on the heart, where the seeds of the Kingdom lie waiting.

But unless we sow the mustard seed, how can God grow the tree?

So let me share with you the seed of a dream I've carried for years. Already we are living out something of this dream.

Some of you will have heard that Vestry is considering a small development at St Andrew's. We'll organise times for the congregations to have input into this in the near future, particularly because the Diocese requires any proposal to be part of a larger Mission Action Plan for the whole parish. A few weeks ago I said I had 4 options to put to you but these will emerge as part of the whole process.

Whatever we do in the parish has to be part of a bigger vision for our ministry and our mission, has to be in some way reflective of the Kingdom of God. All of us hold the seeds of the Kingdom to be lived in this parish, so all of us are needed as we discern our way forward. We all need to be praying to discern the seed of life that God has planted amongst us.

And we need to remind ourselves why we are here – what is our purpose as a parish?

We need to consider the values which undergird our life – how will what we do reflect our hospitality, our creativity, our spirituality, and our justice – for these are all characteristics of the kingdom.

We need to consider our priorities from our visioning process last year – what do we need to do to develop faith and spirituality? How will we build community, and how will we foster new leadership?

And we need to consider not just our needs, not just us here and now, but the needs of the wider community and future generations who won't necessarily do church as we've done it for centuries.

We need to consider our resources – choosing one thing may limit what we do in other areas. But the more relevant we are to community needs, the more likely we are to attract external funding.

There are undreamed of possibilities – even yesterday, someone raised an idea with me which I'd never even thought of!

Whatever we do must be Kingdom work and therefore grounded in Kingdom principles. It must be something that reveals and expresses and invites people into the Kingdom of God – a foretaste of God's place, a taste of God, where the aromas of God and the hospitality and beauty of God somehow shine out.

The Kingdom of God where all are welcome and all are called into life, into community and into God himself.

For a long time I've believed St Andrew's could be developed as a Centre for Spirituality and the Arts:

- where we could offer courses and opportunities for learning and sharing community
- where people can come to take time out, time to nurture the spirit, sit in the garden or explore faith
- where people of all ages can discover their own creativity and express themselves in new ways
- where they can be reminded of the deeper values of human life and experience the hospitality of God
- a place where people feel they belong

Building on what is already happening, I'd like to see meditation rooms and art spaces, a learning centre and a renewed hall with flexible spaces, a play area off the hall and perhaps an Artist in Residence program and places for people just to come and have coffee – imagine if mums waiting to pick up children from school could come and browse in our library or bookshop or look at an art exhibition or sit and have a coffee with friends.

What if the kids from school most at risk could come and walk the labyrinth and find a quiet space inside themselves, where young people could come and discover their own spirituality and creativity and feel welcome and safe, where those coming for food could also sit and rest with coffee and a chat or a paintbrush.

Imagine all of this interwoven with the life of our church, all of it supported and held by a committed praying community of faith, whose daily rhythm of prayer and faithfulness would speak of something different.

One of the things that concerns me most is the rise of depression in our communities. There are things we can offer – not at a clinical level, but preventative things – things to do with spirituality and meditation to ground people more in themselves and in God, creative outlets so people of all

ages can express their deepest feelings in helpful ways, opportunities for people to make things that are beautiful, and community to lessen isolation amongst people of all ages. Spaces to build on what we are already doing.

What if our parish could build something beautiful and hopeful and interesting, a place of peace and community, a place of welcome and belonging, offering good kitchen table hospitality where people could indeed discover the Kingdom of God in a cup of tea, something for the whole community, with different activities and groups sharing the space and enriching each other. We cannot just build for ourselves – we need to make new connections.

Obviously we have no money for this, but if this is Kingdom work, it can only begin with a mustard seed, fertilised by faith – God alone can do the rest.

Whatever we do, it has to be about the Kingdom of God – that's what excites me, because it is about faith and the wonder of watching God work and unfold something marvellous before our eyes. All we have to do is take the tiny mustard seed entrusted to us, hidden away in our hearts, offer it to God, and sow it in the soil of life around us.

We can't keep trying to build the church of the past – the future needs something wonderful and wild, colourful and contemplative, beautiful and surprising, something that will make people stop and look and wonder and want to be part of it. But as people walk past our churches today, are they peering in through the windows and knocking on the doors? I don't think so. As I said to the folk one Wednesday a few weeks ago – I suspect either they don't realise we're here or they think we're just about dead.

We live by faith and not by sight – the Kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground and it would sprout and grow, he knows not how, but the tiniest of seeds can grow into the largest tree where the birds of the air, the people of our community, can come and make nests in its shade.

Catherine Eaton