

2nd Sunday after Trinity – 13th June 2021

2 Cor 5:6-10 [11-13] 14-17; Psalm 92:1-8; Mark 4:26-34

Now we look forward with confidence to our heavenly bodies, realizing that every moment we spend in these earthly bodies is time spent away from our eternal home in heaven with Jesus. ⁷ We know these things are true by believing, not by seeing. ⁸ And we are not afraid but are quite content to die, for then we will be at home with the Lord. ⁹ So our aim is to please him always in everything we do, whether we are here in this body or away from this body and with him in heaven. ¹⁰ For we must all stand before Christ to be judged and have our lives laid bare—before him. Each of us will receive whatever he deserves for the good or bad things he has done in his earthly body.

¹¹ It is because of this solemn fear of the Lord, which is ever present in our minds, that we work so hard to win others. God knows our hearts, that they are pure in this matter, and I hope that, deep within, you really know it too.

¹² Are we trying to pat ourselves on the back again? No, I am giving you some good ammunition! You can use this on those preachers of ours who brag about how well they look and preach but don't have true and honest hearts. You can boast about us that we, at least, are well intentioned and honest.

¹³⁻¹⁴ Are we insane to say such things about ourselves?^(a) If so, it is to bring glory to God. And if we are in our right minds, it is for your benefit. Whatever we do, it is certainly not for our own profit but because Christ's love controls us now. Since we believe that Christ died for all of us, we should also believe that we have died to the old life we used to live. ¹⁵ He died for all so that all who live—having received eternal life from him—might live no longer for themselves, to please themselves, but to spend their lives pleasing Christ who died and rose again for them. ¹⁶ So stop evaluating Christians by what the world thinks about them or by what they seem to be like on the outside. Once I mistakenly thought of Christ that way, merely as a human being like myself. How differently I feel now! ¹⁷ When someone becomes a Christian, he becomes a brand-new person inside. He is not the same anymore. A new life has begun!

If wonder what image Paul could have used to express his convoluted thinking about our lives and our deaths before and after we belonged to Jesus? Would a tiny seed have worked?

Psalm 92 It is good to say thank you to the Lord, to sing praises to the God who is above all gods. ² Every morning tell him, "Thank you for your kindness," and every evening rejoice in all his faithfulness. ³ Sing his praises, accompanied by music from the harp and lute and lyre. ⁴ You have done so much for me, O Lord. No wonder I am glad! I sing for joy.

⁵ O Lord, what miracles you do! And how deep are your thoughts! ⁶ Unthinking people do not understand them! No fool can comprehend this: ⁷ that although the wicked flourish like weeds, there is only eternal destruction ahead of them. ⁸ But the Lord continues forever, exalted in the heavens,

Mark 4:26-34 "Here is another story illustrating what the Kingdom of God is like:

"A farmer sowed his field ²⁷ and went away, and as the days went by, the seeds grew and grew without his help. ²⁸ For the soil made the seeds grow. First a leaf blade pushed through, and later the heads of wheat formed, and finally the grain ripened, ²⁹ and then the farmer came at once with his sickle and harvested it."

³⁰ Jesus asked, "How can I describe the Kingdom of God? What story shall I use to illustrate it? ³¹⁻³² It is like a tiny mustard seed! Though this is one of the smallest of seeds, yet it grows to become one of the largest of plants, with long branches where birds can build their nests and be sheltered."

³³ He used many such illustrations to teach the people as much as they were ready to understand. ³⁴ In fact, he taught only by illustrations in his public teaching, but afterwards, when he was alone with his disciples, he would explain his meaning to them.

Jesus, open our eyes to see you alive, present and powerful today. Holy Spirit sow seeds and infuse all that I say with the hope of resurrection life. Amen.JP

St Paul's words to the Christians in Corinth:

⁷ We know these things are true by believing, not by seeing. ⁸ And we are not afraid but are quite content to die, for then we will be at home with the Lord. ⁹ So our aim is to please him always in everything we do, whether we are here in this body or away from this body and with him in heaven. '

St. Paul is cutting to the chase here, is he not? Do we believe what he said? For his audience these words were calming and full of hope. To non-Christians they may sound insane. Let's take a step back now to hear them in the light of the Gospel's message:

Immediately after describing the Kingdom of God as being like a seed germinating in the ground, without help from the Sower, Jesus asks a rhetorical question, "*How can I describe the kingdom of God?*" Why does he ask this? He's just explained what the Kingdom was like? It's almost as if he's ruminating on another image to describe what he instinctively knows but which his listeners, then and now, need to find their own truth in.

If we were to stop and think about it, everything we have is because of someone else. Last Sunday, Andrew reminded us to stop and to thank those who laid down their lives, or if they came home, their sanity, for the freedoms which we regard as usual and expected. Whom we have become is the result of nature and nurture, of the lives and experiences of those who surrounded us with love and joy as well as experiences of pain, disintegration and life's hard-knock lessons.

What I'm trying to say is that from our baptisms we were all that tiny Gospel seed, relying on the mysteriousness of 'soil' to grow and nurture us so we could

grow into long-branched shelter for our own families, friends, colleagues and world-wide Christian family.

On Tuesday evening I attended a '*Festival of Preaching*' webinar featuring Paula Gooder speaking about her new book '*The Parables*'. She spoke about their historical interpretation, definitions and challenges. She focused on their visual and imaginative adventuring into the world of story-telling which deliberately leaves a thread hanging...

We know, for example, that a mustard seed does not grow into a tree. We also know that a tree does start life as a seed, unleashing its miraculous nature in the soil, growing so that birds' nest and shelter there. Interestingly, this is Jesus' story too. Something small, seemingly insignificant to the rest of the world, the death of a Jew in Jerusalem, miraculously burst into life and changes the course of history to the ends of the Earth.

So, I wondered, where is it the Gospel asks us to go next? Let's dig deeper by asking some questions. Did the tree continue its growth, or did its leaves start dropping off, one by one? Did it thirst because it hadn't been watered? Did it hunger because it was hidden from the sun and rain? Did it eventually droop and die? Is its dying a necessary part of a life-cycle? Maybe this is what Paul meant.

We need only look at statistics to tell us that UK Church membership is growing towards some kind of death. This has been happening, slowly, over a long period of time and for many significant reasons, which cannot be addressed here. If, as Christians, we recognise this, maybe due to our own thirsting and hunger, we need to give serious consideration to what St. Paul says, 'So our aim is to please him always, in everything we do'.

God is a promise-keeper. There is no room for down-heartedness in our responses to little deaths, some confusion and certain change, nationally, in Portsmouth Diocese and in our Deanery. Hear again St. Paul's words, Jesus... 'died for all so that all who live—having received eternal life from him—might live no longer for themselves, to please themselves, but to spend their lives pleasing Christ who died and rose again for them.'

This is how to slake thirst and satisfy hunger...please Jesus and glorify God. Florence Nightingale said, "I never lose an opportunity of urging a practical beginning, however small, for it is wonderful how often in such matters the mustard-seed germinates and roots itself." Here are several examples of what she meant:

Messy Church. Lucy Moore had a seed of an idea which she shared with her Waterlooville congregation. Over ten years now, Messy Church has grown into an international worshipping community, with offshoots such as discipleship teaching and Messy Vintage. The seed was planted, mysteriously grew; now it flourishes and thrives!

For our younger listeners, I read about a vicar with teenage children who used the social-media platform 'TikTok' to plant seeds in her parish. She sent a humorous 'TikTok' to seven teenagers, who shared it and it 'went viral'. [I can send you the link if you want to see it.] *"TikTok isn't the place for deep theological debate," explains Revd Beverley... We hope and pray that some of the seeds that we are scattering will produce fruit in the future."*

If you haven't heard about 'The Eternal Wall' yet. Do find out about it. It will be an 'Angel of the North' sized structure having been built in a field in Coventry, each brick representing one answered prayer. Also, pilgrimage is the 'new' ancient pathway [Days of Prayer on Thursday next week], thinking about ecological care for churchyards, feeding the hungry at foodbanks and pantries, teaching children and young people using 'Open the Book', are all examples of tiny seeds, buried in the soil of God's Love, which ultimately seek Jesus, find Jesus, plant Jesus and praise Jesus, thereby glorifying God... which brings us nicely back to Paul's words and Jesus' challenging question, this time directed to our parishes: 'How can we describe the Kingdom of God?'

I end with St. Paul's words: *So, stop evaluating Christians by what the world thinks about them or by what they seem to be like on the outside. Once, I mistakenly thought of Christ that way, merely as a human being like myself. How differently I feel now! ¹⁷ When someone becomes a Christian, they become a brand-new person inside. They are not the same anymore. A new life has begun!' Amen! Alleluia!*

https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/stories-and-features/it-was-ridiculous-how-vicars-tiktok-meant-seven-teenagers?mc_cid=7daa6d2f6e&mc_eid=06479823d9