

Kingdom Parables

Pentecost 6 with the readings of Pentecost 4 (Mark 4:26-34)

St. Andrew's Kelowna

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**I speak with you this morning in the presence of God and the beloved people of God.
Amen.**

It is an absolute delight to gather for worship this morning as we welcome Kate, Christian, Geoff, Patricia, Kate, Mary and members of their families here with the Vancouver School of Theology's summer course "Where Theology Meets the Soil". It is so good to be with you!

When we marked National Indigenous Day of Prayer our regular Sunday lectionary readings took a step back and so today we are reuniting with them not only because they are marvellous readings but because they are also the readings the VST course began with yesterday.

These two parables from Mark's Gospel are themselves nestled within other parables. This section of parables comes between Jesus telling the crowds that all who do the will of God are in fact his family and the story of Jesus in the boat with the terrified disciples calming the storm that we heard last week when Austan and Oliver were confirmed. Between this forging of God's family beyond any of society's kinship bonds and the storms at sea are these parables of the Kingdom of God, of seeds and of growing.

The working out of God's reality among us is like seeds that grow silently in the earth, the bringing together of heaven and earth is like this, the life of new creation as Paul calls it in our epistle, our very hope as Christian people, is something like the smallest seed growing into a plant so great that birds rest in its branches. It's imagery those listening to Jesus would have found familiar for a great Kingdom from Ezekiel and from Daniel but it's not familiar imagery for how God would accomplish it. These are agricultural images not military or political ones and yet we're talking about Kings and Kingdoms. And so the Kingdom of God, the realm or the reign or maybe the kin-dom or the culture of God- we search for right word- that describes both the Divine power and authority in Jesus and this deeply humble, agrarian way.

Yesterday the VST class spent the morning on the farm and, like it has for many of us, having your hands in the soil begins to open up the agricultural parables in new ways. Interestingly, as we receive these parables, this is the first year multiple kinds of birds - robins and quails - have come to nest (I've put some photos up on facebook). When we engaged these parables together yesterday afternoon we shared our different denominational interpretations (there are 5 denominations in our class!) that ranged from the Kingdom as somewhere you strive to enter at the end of your life, to the something we are each charged with bringing about through our own lives and ministries here and now, to something we just catch a glimpse- already but not yet- to a type of consciousness. Over the last four years here at St. Andrew's we have been growing in our

understanding of God's Kingdom not as place but as a state of being when God reigns in us and among us, when Christ's life is the very animating force of our own through the Holy Spirit, and as this happens a new creation begins to grow, a new way of being human becomes visible in our relationships with each other and the whole created order. Our hope in Christ is not that a new world will one day appear out of nothing but that God is renewing the world from what is; what God did in Jesus' resurrection is what God is doing, and will do, for the entire created order, which is why we talk about Christ as the first fruits of what is come. As our lives and relationships come to participate in the self-giving love of our Triune God, a new creation is being born, like those seeds that grow until they are ready for harvest.

It is this reality and hope of the Kingdom of God that grounds us, and like in the text this morning it is in fact right in the middle, it is the very heart of us who are both called to do the will of God together and are also tossed about in the storms, be them personal, ecclesial, social or ecological. This week has held so much for so many of us here from navigating family illnesses and injuries, to the sudden death of dear friends, to major life decisions surrounded by the ongoing violence in Ukraine, Sudan and Gaza and serious concerns about formal conflict between Israel and Lebanon. A parable, we remember, is story that seeks to open its listeners up to God's reality. As one writer has put it: 'parables confront us with a different picture of the world, and challenge us with two questions: "Do you get it?" and "Will you live it?"'.

Since Covid, we have been sending ourselves out from worship each week with the words: "Go and keep choosing God's Kingdom!". Go and choose the Kingdom along side anyone who does the will of God, within each storm, in the face of the many other kingdoms and rulers of this world that call for our attention, allegiance and identity. In the choosing we are learning and in the learning we are living and deep in the soil the seed is growing, first the stalk, and then head and then grain.....

Amen.