

## **The Mustard Seed**

This week, I heard a lovely story about how something small can transform a life.

The story is about a blind beggar sitting in a street in Glasgow, in his rags with nothing but a tattered paper cup with some small change. Along came a business woman, busy and striding to her work; she saw the man and drew closer, he touched her shoes, she said, "Give me your placard." which read, *I am blind, please help*. So far, he had collected only a few small coins. But then something wonderful happened.

The woman started to walk away when suddenly she stopped as if struck by inspiration. She turned back to the beggar, and took the sign into her own hands. After looking at it briefly, she turned it over and wrote something on the other side. Once finished, she handed the sign back to the blind man so that the new words were visible. After saying goodbye, the elegantly dressed woman was on her way.

Shortly afterward, something changed: The bowl was filling up more quickly than usual. The blind man could not believe it.

Never before had people been so generous. He wondered what the woman could have possibly written on his sign. He soon found out when the woman greeted him on her way back from work. The blind man recognised her voice and asked her what she had written. The answer was bewildering: she said "Only the truth. I said the same thing you did, only with different words. The sign now says, *Today is a wonderful day and I cannot see it.*"

The wish behind both sentences was the same, but the message was different. The original sentence said that the man was blind and needed help. Once changed, the sign stated that people could be happy to enjoy that wonderful day using all of their senses.

A blue sky, blooming flowers — such things can beautify everyday life. Far too often we do not see the beautiful things because we focus on what troubles us, or on the things we do not have. Every day, there are a thousand reasons to be grateful. We can focus on hardship, or go through the world with a smile.

*The Kingdom of Heaven is like the mustard seed* said Jesus, which was the smallest seed known in Palestine at that time. Jesus uses the analogy of the

mustard seed in a later conversation in Matthew 17v20; where he says *if you have faith as big as a mustard seed, you can say to this hill, "Go from here to there!" And it will go. You could do anything.*

The first hearers would have been shocked at Jesus' description of the Kingdom of Heaven. They expected that when God's Kingdom would be established on Earth it would be great; they were not prepared for it being an insignificant seed.

Jesus' mustard seed speaks of the significance that one life can make in the battle against the evils of the world. He tells his disciples that they are to be like salt which can transform the flavour of the world and light which illuminates evil and darkness.

The Kingdom was now present, but it would start small, like a mustard seed, like yeast in the dough.

But like the mustard seed, let us start small, it might just be a family member who needs a hand, someone in church who is struggling; start the revolution and make a difference for the Kingdom of Heaven - like a mustard seed.

Thanks be to God that in Jesus, we have one who became a seed for us and who died on a cross and was buried and raised to life. The Bible tells us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

May we be encouraged that through Jesus you are also a seed that can bring blessings to others.

Chris will now share about the Kingdom of Heaven being like treasure.

## **The Dragnet**

During the occupation of Europe by Nazi Germany during World War 2, millions of people experienced unspeakable horror. Concentration camps mushroomed throughout Europe where minority groups, chiefly Jews but also Gypsies, homosexuals, and anti-Nazi civilians, were at first confined and then executed. The fear of arrest that everyday people felt turned to a paralysing terror. Daily life was dominated by the presence of the German military and the dreaded SS forces.

But despite this, there arose within the terror another response – the underground resistance – made up of various secret and clandestine groups that opposed Nazi rule. From Southern France to Northern Scandinavia and into the Soviet Union, widely diverse groups of civilians as well as armed bands of guerrilla fighters worked secretly against the occupation. The activities ranged from publishing clandestine newspapers to assisting the escape of Jews and allied men shot down over enemy territory to committing acts of sabotage and ambushing German patrols. These were brave men and women who could not overtly resist the powerful German forces but who covertly operated to bring freedom to their people.

But the will and ability to fight on covertly was in large measure kept alive by one abiding hope – the rumoured coming Allied invasion. The effort, ability, and the resources of the resistance would most likely have waned except for that hope of the coming liberation. As the months and years dragged on, one of the most important efforts of the resistance was preparing for and coordinating with the invasion by conveying intelligence to the allied forces. Finally on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944, D-Day, also called Operation Overlord, the Allied rescue of Western Europe began. I use this illustration not to highlight war but to speak on what I believe Jesus was doing in his ministry with the announcement about the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The dragnet was the oldest type of net used in Lake Galilee and until recent times, it was the most important fishing method. The net would be used between two boats and as the name suggest dragged behind the boat scooping up the fish. Then an important part of fishing for Jews was to separate the fish, some were edible and according to their law some weren't. Bad fish were those without fins and scales and they would be tossed back into the sea.

This parable represents D-day, the day that God returns, Judgement Day when Jesus comes again in power to consummate the establishment of his Kingdom on earth. This is a universal judgement and the net swoops up everyone and God sends his angels to separate evil from good and confine the evil ones to hell.

This parable connects with the illustration of the Nazis in the Second World War. The resistance worked towards this great day when they would be liberated from the evil powers of Hitler and the Nazis and evil would come under the judgement, so Jesus encouraged his followers to keep going because there would be a day of judgement and evil would finally be driven out.

In Jesus' day, Rome dominated the land – in fact the Roman Empire reached here, just outside our Church; a Roman fort was built on the other side of the canal as part of the Antonine Wall. They were powerful – who would stand up against them?

Ruthless leaders induced fear of imprisonment and execution. People died in their hunger and disease and their daily experiences were grim. But Jesus knew that the Kingdom was coming. He had inside information! His parables all spoke about what the Kingdom of God will be like.

He was forming a resistance movement, Jesus was declaring that the Kingdom was already here, but only as a tiny manifestation.

Jesus was encouraging his disciples to be like mustard seeds falling into enemy territory and transforming the world from the inside out. That's why he taught them to love their enemy, to go the extra mile, to share their goods, to turn the other cheek. It was subversive, counter-cultural but transformational.

We are all called to follow Jesus and in doing so, let us recognise the great treasure that he has given us, let our faith move mountains, and our deeds and words rise like yeast, and transform our homes, church, community and world.

When we do the Kingdom of Heaven has come.