



Sunday Reflection

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 16 June 2024

Pentecost 4

**The Rector will preach at St John's
& at St Margaret's:-**

The smallest seeds can produce abundant fruit. We come to worship today asking God to give us grace to make even the smallest contribution to the kingdom and to give thanks for the transformation God brings about.

"The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground." Mark 4:26

An illustration to set the scene

If you're old enough, you might have learned to read with the Ladybird Books series "**Peter and Jane**".

These small hardbacks have subjects ranging from nursery rhymes to history and science.

One of their titles was about how the motor car works. Although aimed at children, it was well worth reading if you were starting out driving – an easy explanation of what happened under the bonnet.

It would be useless now, because engines have changed so much.

If you open the bonnet of a modern car you're confronted with a confusing set of boxes.

There is no distributor cap, no points to change. Everything has become even more of a mystery.

Of course it's perfectly possible to drive a car without any understanding of how it actually works.

Keep filling it with fuel, or charging it, and leave the rest to regular servicing.

Today's Gospel teaching

Today's Gospel describes two common events that most of us just take for granted.

We sow seeds and they grow. Or rather, those of us who know how to look after them do.

The first story tells us of someone who sowed seeds, then went about their normal daily routine – sleeping at night and waking in the day.

All the while the seed begins to do its work of growing, thanks to the earth in which it lies.

“The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head.”

But the planter doesn't know how it happens.

Even these days, when scientific study has provided the answer, it still seems a mysterious process if you watch it happen.

The second story is the well-known parable of the mustard seed.

Commentators wonder which plant Jesus was referring to.

It was probably the black mustard, an annual, which grows to between three and four metres in a season and birds nest in its branches.

Jesus is making the point that such growth from a tiny seed is truly remarkable.

The kingdom of God, "is as if someone would scatter seed".

And again, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God...? It is like a mustard seed..."

Jesus describes the kingdom by metaphor and story.

Its mystery is deep, its reach broad, so he uses metaphors that will be familiar to his hearers.

How can we apply the teaching to our own lives?

Jesus' descriptions of a kingdom don't describe any kingdom his listeners would have been familiar with, and they are hardly the terms we would use to describe the United Kingdom or any other monarchy.

They draw on the mystery that is God's action in the world.

The challenge is to recognise it and to enter into the mystery.

The world can seem a difficult and godless place.

Perhaps we ask, with the psalmist in Psalm 13,

"How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?"

Or perhaps we make the focus of that question the world itself.

We look for signs of God's action but we fail to see them.

We ask when God's kingdom will arrive, triumphant, clear to all.

When will our churches be filled with people who have turned to God?

When will the world notice and believe?

But we look in the wrong place and expect the wrong thing.

The kingdom of God is a mystery, stealthily growing and affecting the world in ways we don't understand.

Our job is to scatter the seed.

We do not understand how it grows and, in many cases, we do not even see the result for ourselves.

But in God's remarkable way people are sustained by the food that grows from a tiny seed, or sheltered by the branches of the surprising foliage that appears when they need it.

Jesus' words describe something tentative, a possibility and a mystery.

It is **"as if someone would scatter seed"**.

Are we open to the possibility of scattering?

Are we willing to be a conduit in God's extraordinary project, even if the mystery is often beyond our understanding?

And yet, sometimes, we are there to harvest the grain, or join others in the shelter of the largest shrub, and to rejoice with them at God's work.

"The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground." Mark 4:26

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