

Lord God, plant seeds of faith in our hearts so we respond to your Spirit and live as members of the body of Christ.  
Amen.

- OK here's the punchline! The Kingdom of God is Jesus Christ!
- What is there in our Gospel reading this morning that affirms that? Take a quick look at it and you're probably decide, nothing at all! We've got two short parables. The parable of the farmer planting seed and waiting for the miracle to happen – he doesn't know how. And the much loved parable of the mustard seed. Jesus tells us both but he doesn't mention himself at all.
- How would you define the Kingdom of God? Well, I guess if you're anything like me, your mind naturally gravitates to a place without pain or worry or stress. All is happy and peaceful and perfect. And I find myself naturally drawing the conclusion that this means I will finally have the time and energy to do a few things I want to do. Think of myself! Fulfil a few dreams! Because surely my dream to cycle the length and breadth of the British Isles must come from God?
- But I pull you back to the punchline! The Kingdom of God is Jesus Christ!
- The justification for saying this is that Mark didn't write his Gospel to be read in small chunks. He wrote it to be read aloud, starting at the beginning and proclaiming the Good News in it's (or his) entirety. And right at the start, just 15 verses into chapter one, Jesus says, *'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'* He's not talking about some abstract thing or place or idea which you can't see or touch or feel. He's talking about himself. He's saying, "If you want salvation, focus upon me!"
- So here's the punchline! The Kingdom of God is Jesus Christ!
- Again the temptation is to leave this as an event in the past, so that we don't really have to do much about it today. Jesus died for my sins and rose again to grant me forgiveness, so I'm ok. I've got my promise of entry into the Kingdom of God so that when I die I can live with Jesus in his Kingdom. Meanwhile I can go on making money, and ignoring the consequences of my actions.
- But the other reading from 2 Corinthians quickly says something different. Jesus Christ is not just a historical person, the presence of God on earth 2 000 years ago. He's still here today. Risen. Alive. Living within us. *'if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! As we'll say in a few minutes time before we share the Peace, "We are the body of Christ ..."* Christ gives us life and he is alive today.
- The beauty of the little parables we heard today is that they contain death and resurrection within them. They start with something dead. A mustard seed. A handful of seed scattered by a farmer in a field. And new life sprouts. We don't know how. But God does! Out of a dead seed comes resurrection, new life. A mustard tree. An ear of well fruited grain.
- Here's the punchline! The Kingdom of God is Jesus Christ! And he's very much alive and kicking in the world of Christians today. And I know that many of you know quite a lot about death and resurrection in your own lives. If you don't know what I'm talking about, listen in!
- It can be quite hard to justify the Kingdom of God, Jesus Christ, when we look at the sinful state of the world today. We are all enmeshed in a system that favours the rich and exploits the poor. And like it or not, compared to the huge majority of people in the world today, nearly every one of us is very rich indeed.
- We live in an organized society that has managed to inoculate a huge proportion of its population and we think ourselves graciously generous by offering 100 million doses to our brothers and sisters in the  $\frac{2}{3}$  world instead of worrying about the billions who still haven't got it.
- And have we not gone too far down the road of climate change for it to become a one way journey from which there is no recovery? Where is this body of Christ in our own lives?
- That's where these parables come into their own. They start with the smallest of beginnings. A handful of seed. One mustard seed. They start from a position of little hope. They start with death and they produce life. They

start from a position of ignorance. The sower doesn't know how his seed grows! They start with life where we are and they produce Good News. Good fruit! A huge mustard tree! Ripe grain! And it's God who makes it happen and not us. Or rather, it's God who makes it happen through us!

- Because rest assured. If we do nothing; if we don't allow Christ to work through us, then we'll miss the resurrection here on earth and we won't notice the Kingdom spreading.
- If I spend hours in church relying on Jesus in a devout position of prayer and then go home and continue ignoring my neighbour in need or not considering how my everyday life impacts the environment, then I'm not going to feel very involved with Christ building the Kingdom on earth. In fact I'm probably not going to believe it's happening. I'm going to be waiting for it to happen at some point in the future. Hopefully after I die, if I'm rich and comfortable. Remember if no one plants the seed, it cannot be resurrected into life.
- If I shrug my shoulders and think to myself, "Well I can't make any difference so I may as well not bother. It's those multi-national corporations. It's Governments that have got to change. It's everybody else", then I'm almost writing myself out of the Kingdom of God. Remember the parables don't start with huge well-resourced plans that change the world. They start with one mustard seed. A handful of grain.
- What difference can it possibly make if I walk to the shops instead of drive? How can my donation of £25 to Christian Aid really matter? But it's just one mustard seed. A handful of grain!
- And both our readings today have the promise of impending judgement. Once the seed in the field has been resurrected into stalk, head and ripe full grain, 'at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.'
- St Paul is even clearer in 2 Corinthians, 'all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.'
  - I'm not sure I want to believe that if we haven't done enough good works when we appear before the judgement seat, we won't get through. That sounds suspiciously like salvation by works, and as we know Christ has won salvation for us at the cost of his life, rather than our own. But I'm not sure it would be a very comfortable interview for you or me if we could not look at our lives and point to the fruit. Because as St Paul also says in verse 14, 'The love of Christ urges us on', and if we cannot point to much love of neighbour, love of God's creation in our own life then the shock of Christ's love pouring all over us, might be too hard to bear when we have to give up so many dearly held preconceptions.
- I said a few minutes ago that I know that many of you know quite a lot about death and resurrection in your own lives.
  - If you can identify with sacrificial giving, giving so it hurts, whether in time, or emotion or finance, then you'll understand about death and resurrection in your own life.
  - If you have ever had to grit your teeth and make a huge positive effort to get on with someone and work with them, despite the fact that they've hurt you really badly and don't seem to know or care, then you'll know about death and resurrection in your own life.
  - If you've ever had to make a decision that you know is not in your best interests or possibly in the best interests of your family, in order to allow something else to happen, then you'll know about death and resurrection in your own life.
  - If you've ever made a decision about what you are going to eat, or buy, or how you travel, because you are worried about it's effect on the environment, or you have ever paid extra because you want to make sure what you get is fair trade, you'll know about death and resurrection in your own life.
  - If you've ever used what power you have at a cost to yourself, to make a difference to someone without that power, then you'll know about death and resurrection in your own life.
- And if you manage to relate any of that to the death and resurrection of Jesus, because you have Christ living within you, then you will have allowed the Kingdom of God to spread and you will have allowed the seed to sprout and the mustard seed to grow!
- Don't worry about starting small. Seeds are small! Don't think it won't make any difference. It will. As Paul says, 'we walk by faith, not by sight.' But keep planting those seeds!
- Where are you going to plant next?