

St Alban's
Church

Anglican Parish
of Eastbourne



The Seeds of the Kingdom: Part Two

Rev Canon Dr Eleanor Sanderson

19th February 2017

Leviticus 19:1-2,9-18

1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23

Matthew 5:38-48

This is the second in a two-part series about the seeds of the Gospel, the seeds of God's Kingdom. Last week we focused on how those seeds can be planted in our lives; how the Kingdom of God is born in us and comes to life. We reflected together on the parable of the sower, where seeds falls on different kinds of ground (some shallow, some filled with weeds, some on hard concrete and some on rich deep soil) and we acknowledged that we can be so easily distracted from caring for the kingdom seeds that are generously scattered all around the world and therefore prevent the Kingdom of God from coming to life within us. We heard Moses reminding the people of Israel that they had a choice to make as they left their years of wandering in the wilderness and took their first steps on to the promised land: choose life or death, follow God and life. We then heard Christ speak to us from the Sermon on the Mount, let our yes be yes and our no be no (if you choose the Kingdom of God then choose the Kingdom, don't let your attitude be to see how much you can get away with, because that attitude is a deathly attitude it isn't life giving at all!). We brought those two teachings together and we

heard that same call to us, choose life, choose first the kingdom, let the seeds of faith come alive within us.

So today, we now think about what those kingdom seeds look like when they do come alive within us. In other words, what do those kingdom seeds actually bring to life? How do they change us?

Well, actively being part of the Kingdom of God changes the way we live. In our reading from Leviticus we see that it creates in us a hospitality, a generosity, a love for others, and a holiness. It creates the ability to not gossip, slander and speak badly of one another. It creates the ability to forgive. And, just as last week we saw Jesus enliven the commandments of the first covenant and law in a new way, so we see him do it again in the Gospel reading today. The holiness of God is seen in loving the unlovable, in blessing and not cursing those who may curse you and those who may oppress you. “There must be no limit to your goodness, as your heavenly father’s goodness knows no bounds” (Matthew 5:48) says Jesus. The capacity to do these things are a consequence of the kingdom seeds bursting into life within us. These are the fruits of the Kingdom in our lives.

We are God’s garden. We are God’s field. We are God’s building. These are the Kingdom fruits which God grows in us and through us.

Our whole life, in many ways, is about watering, nurturing and letting God grow these kingdom seeds in our life. There is lovely imagery in our readings today, as there were last week. The seeds are planted generously by the sower and the water that causes these seeds to grow also flows generously; it rains on the righteous and the unrighteous alike. That rain, I think, is love.

Whenever people are soaked in love and live in love, we see Kingdom fruits, for God is revealed as love. The rain, as the seeds, goes everywhere, because God is generous.

When we make a clear decision to live with God and follow Jesus, we are deciding to actively join with our gardener God in the tending of these seeds within our lives. We consciously join the gardener, we partner with God in our lives. This might mean that we start to sense God telling us where the weeds in our life are, where the hard patches of stone are, where the shallow soil needs more fertiliser. We tend our own gardens alongside the master gardener. And we have to be careful, just like God's first covenant people, to constantly choose the life of this partnership. You see, we can decide to put up our umbrella and decide that we would rather allow ourselves to foster bitterness or grumbling, or keeping all our resources to ourselves, or plotting against those who hurt us rather than actively letting the rain of God's love penetrate our lives and seek God's blessing for **all** others. We can make those decisions. Or we can each day decide to stand under the showers of heaven and let God wash away all that we need to be washed away and let ourselves soak in the showers of love till we are totally saturated.

This process reminds me of a powerful image from the lands of the Bible. The Dead Sea is dead because water flows into it and doesn't flow out. It is that simple. Love and self-giving are to flow out of us generously in the same way that God's rain flows; without thought for whether it flows to someone who deserves it or not. And as soon as we start to pick up and discriminate between who we will and will not share our love with, our life with and our resources with, the Dead Sea analogy creeps into our life. This is why Jesus says, those who seek their life lose it and those who lose their life for the sake of

the Gospel keep it. It's about the flow of life coming into and out of us. This is the economics of God's Kingdom. This is why you can't have revenge, or slander, or gossip, or un-forgiveness, or radically unequal wealth in the Kingdom of God, or hatred of the alien or refugee, because all those things illustrate that love is not flowing out as generously as it is raining in.

Living in the Kingdom takes trust. It is huge trust. Huge trust that there is a gardener tending us. Trust that there is rain coming down on us. Trust that we can seek first the kingdom of God and all else will be given to us. That is trust. That is a relationship with God. It is a relationship based on trust.

The liturgy when I was baptised asked me three questions, do you believe and trust in God the Father, do you believe and trust in God the Son, Jesus Christ, do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit? Making this decision of belief and trust is constant and it has consequences.

The consequence of this belief and trust, as in the parable of the sower, is that the Kingdom of God will be fruitful and multiply. Love begets love, forgiveness begets forgiveness; we reap what we sow. That is what God has always said to us as his children.

I want to share with you a poem by Ulrich Schafer:

*I am persuaded by the dandelion
to take to the wings of the updraft...
to parachute into enemy territory...
to fall to the ground...
to be walked on...*

to lose beauty...

to die...

and so to give birth to a whole new generation of flyers

The dandelion seed is perfectly designed to partner with the wind. Its very being is a symbol of trust in the power of the wind. It does not make sense if there is no such thing as wind.

We are perfectly designed to partner with God. We come alive when we believe and trust in God. And when we come alive in God, we let our life flow in such a way as we bring life to others and we begin to care about that far more than we care about our egos or ourselves.

