

Collect, Readings and Sermon for Sunday 26th September 2021
The Fourth Sunday of Creationtide

Collect

Heavenly Lord,
you long for the world's salvation:
stir us from apathy,
restrain us from excess
and revive in us new hope
that all creation will one day be healed
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Romans 8:14-25

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Mark 4:26-32

[Jesus] also said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.'

He also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.'

Sermon by John Richardson

You may feel that sermons during this creationtide are turning into horticultural lectures! What they are saying is that our relationship with God's creation is fundamental to our existence and to our relationship with him and with one another.

Three weeks ago Theresa began her sermon by talking about ragwort. This week I am going to talk about alstroemeria. You'll see why a little later on.

Today's Gospel has two parables: the parable of the sower and the parable of the mustard seed. Both of them are about the Kingdom of God. Both of them have traditionally been seen as parables about God's Word and about how the message of God's kingdom is spread.

Looking at the parable of the sower, the first question we might ask is "Who is the sower?" It's not obvious from the parable, especially when we hear the words "he does not know how." Who is he and what doesn't he know? Can Jesus be talking about God? Is God the sower?

Surely if God is the sower he must know what he is doing? God sows the seed, nurtures it and brings it to fruition. Or does he? If it is God, why is he said to be sleeping and not knowing how the seed sprouts and grows? So it doesn't seem likely that God is the sower.

Another possibility is that the sower is Jesus. The seed he is sowing is God's word. The fact that he doesn't know how it spreads and grows suggests that the business of spreading the word should be left to his disciples. But that doesn't seem likely. They didn't seem competent enough to do that. They always seem to be shying away from responsibility with all their shortcomings and reluctance to get involved. Surely Jesus knows what he is doing?

So if the sower is not God or Jesus, who is it? It seems much more likely that the sower is you and me. I say that because I keep coming back to those words "He does not know how." The sower sows the seed. But that's all he does. He has no idea what happens next or how the seed sprouts and grows. If anyone does not know when it comes to the workings of God, it's surely you and me.

We are called to sow the seed of God's word. What happens to it then we simply do not know. If we are faithful to our calling and share with others what we have come to know of God's love and goodness, then we often have no way of knowing what the consequences of that may be. Which makes being a disciple a very exciting adventure. We do our best to share the love of God with others. We may never know whether or not that love has touched them. Nor may we ever know the extent to which they have gone on to share that love with others. We may never know how it has changed their lives.

How does all this fit in with God's creation? It fits in because of what we read at the beginning of John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

It is the Word of God that creates. God calls into being the creation and every living thing. Jesus is God's Word, because he too creates. He creates a new world built on the foundation of God's love. If we are his followers that makes us a part of the creative process - by sharing love, by showing compassion, by being merciful, by giving hope, by fighting injustice and inequality, by being prepared

to forgive, by respecting and valuing God's creation. Making these things central to the way we live our lives we become part of God's creative process.

Just as we do not know the results of our sowing of God's word, so we often do not know what effect we are having on God's creation. Just as we can be part of the creative process, so we can be part of the process that destroys it. Our actions in using and misusing God's creation point to the fact that we often do not know what we are doing. Or if we do know, then we have an awareness that we are working against God rather than with him.

I haven't forgotten about the alstroemeria. It is one of my favourite flowers. And we have some in our garden. What I did not realise until last week is that they are very invasive. So much so that they have even strangled and killed off one of our rose bushes. Once you have them, they are almost impossible to get rid of it.

Which brings me round to the parable of the mustard seed. Traditionally this has been seen as a parable about the way in which the word of God spreads. From very small beginnings there can come very large results. So large does the mustard plant grow that all the birds can rest on its branches and shelter underneath its leaves. It produces results out of all proportion to its beginnings. That's the way the Word of God works.

What the parable does not tell us is that the mustard plant is like the alstroemeria flower. Once you've got it you can't get rid of it. As far as the farmer is concerned, growing mustard seed is not a good idea. It is so invasive that once you've got it you can give up the idea of ever trying to get rid of it. Which may well be seen as a parable of the way in which the human race has treated God's creation. Instead of respecting and valuing God's creation we have often misused and abused it - to the extent that our actions are in many cases irreversible.

Which tells me that we have to be careful what we sow. I like to think that when we talk about the Word of God we are not just talking about the written word we find in the Bible. We are talking about the things in our lives that result from listening to that Word: our actions, our decisions, our hopes, our fears, what gives us inspiration and purpose, what decides our priorities. The Word of God gives us life as God intended it to be.

We are slowly coming to realise how much we depend on God's creation. By that I mean just how interdependent we all are - not just us but every living thing on this planet. Every single part of creation interacts with and effects every other part.

Once we grasp that truth we begin to see things very differently.

That is the truth behind both of these parables - that it matters what we sow. That if we sow as God intended us to - if we value and respect this world and its people and all that is in it, then we are doing our best to ensure that God's creation is here for those who come after us, and that they too will have an opportunity to live their lives as God intended.