

A Prayer Project for the Summer

When my youngest grandson was born he was surprisingly small. He was by no means the smallest baby born at 38 weeks. Compared with some, he was comfortably big. Still, for the next four months his parents struggled to keep his weight up. He was off the bottom of the charts. Fortunately, his weight gain mostly followed the 'good' curve. By five months he had made it to the twelve pound mark and his parents were able to relax and start to enjoy their cuddles, coos, and giggles with this responsive and alert little boy.

In the parables as recounted by St. Mark, Jesus tells a similar story about the Kingdom of God. It's like a mustard seed he says, it starts off tiny but don't underestimate it. It's pretty tenacious and grows tough and strong. It's not a mighty tree like a sturdy cedar of Lebanon but its branches spread out in all directions and provide ample shelter for those who seek it. More to the point, within just two months the plant produces seed. So in no time at all one sowing of mustard seeds can reproduce itself and spread ever more widely. Once sown, it's notoriously difficult to eliminate.

This is reassuring in times like these when the church in so many countries is under attack. It reminds us that God is with us when our faith is small, when our church is small, when persecution spreads fear and drives worshippers underground. God's timescale is not our timescale, his action plan might well seem topsy-turvy to us.

We have the idea that churches should be full, and that there should be one on almost every corner, that there will always be ample and capable leaders who will be available 24/7 and that society doesn't know what it is missing by rejecting God. Our view of church, of God's Kingdom, is, perhaps, that it should be strong and stand out in our local communities. But is this what Jesus is saying in this parable?

No, this parable stresses what God can do with someone's tiny seed of faith, with a small church. It's a parable for our times. It looks at our place in the world and says that's fine. You don't need the world view of power. You need the mustard seed. God's Kingdom does church in unlikely places, humble places, away from the spotlight. These are the places the Kingdom needs to be, places where tiny seeds can grow and in turn spread the word that God cares and God's people care. There are organisations across Manchester for example, living out the Christian message for the poor, the weak, the homeless. Often they take a single focus but have doors open to all. Some of our congregation work with them, as volunteers or raising funds or donations of much needed items. Organisations like these model the mustard seed at work.

With this parable in mind then, now is a good time to think about what God's Kingdom might be like in Droylsden today. Our congregations, at St Andrew's and St. Martin's at least, are quite small but they are strong and committed. Our buildings are good, accessible and versatile. These are not churches likely to close. In the past congregations were much bigger. Today though, we live in the time of the mustard seed. Small congregations offer opportunities to think and plan creatively for exciting witness and worship, drawing on the gifts of all the people, but they need to be open to the challenge of new thinking and collaborative working.

The St Martin's – St. Andrew's Mission Partnership is a good example of creative thinking. It encourages us to pool our spiritual talents and resources and to think in new ways. We are learning not only to worship together but to work together too. As we plan activities we are beginning to think outside our core community and consider what it would take to include others.



Over the coming months we will be thinking about new and creative ways of sharing and spreading God's Kingdom work in our Partnership Parishes. We are not a mighty cedar. We will probably never again be mighty cedars. But if the model for our times is not the cedar but the tiny and effective mustard seed, then it is easier to sense God's hand at work in our reduced circumstances and to see opportunity, both liberating and exciting, rather than doom and gloom. So please give yourselves a prayer project this summer: pray for creative thinking, reflect on small but successful Christian organisations you know of (eg Food Banks, Wood St Mission, the Booth Centre, Boaz Trust) and ponder the ingredients of their success and whether there is anything we could 'borrow', pray in the knowledge that God is here with us, and keep your eyes and ears open to the exciting possibilities God offers.

Have a lovely summer and go with God.

Penny