

SHORT, ALL-AGE TALK 13.9.26, MARK 4:26-35

THE KINGDOM OF GOD – ‘MIRACLE GROW’

As we reminded ourselves last Sunday, Jesus said: “I am the True Vine”. Jesus compared himself to an ordinary, garden plant commonly seen in Israel. Not only that, Jesus invites us (several times) to imagine the Kingdom of God as being like ordinary plants growing – towards heaven - from the earth. Here in Mark 4, Jesus first talks of wheat growing in a field. He then likens the Kingdom of God to one of the smallest of all seeds.

The focus of the first story is that, once the seed has been sown, the farmer does not need to do anything for there to be a harvest. I think any farmer or gardener today might have something to say about that... Even Adam & Eve in the Garden of Eden were told to **work** the land, as part of their care for it. So, there has always been a need to find ways to cultivate the soil, to encourage healthier growth & also a bigger harvest.

And here I can mention ‘Miracle-Gro’... (Other products are also available!). ‘Miracle-Gro’ itself is a special combination of Nitrogen, Phosphorus & Potassium. And it claims to guarantee a healthier plant, possibly twice as big too... **But** there are natural, more organic ways to encourage healthier plants and a more fruitful crop. The Christian charity we support every harvest, Operation Agri, always encourages farmers to use cheaper, more immediate ‘Miracle-Gro’. More important than that: it’s the combination of seed & soil (& some other vital ingredients) which really produce the ‘miracle growth’ in the first place. God our Heavenly Father has built the miracle of growth into all creation. Thanks be to God!

Jesus’ 2nd parable here makes the point about how God can use something almost invisible to the eye, to grow into something that no-one can fail to notice. A single, tiny mustard seed, which can be blown anywhere by the wind, will be transformed into a tree which gives life-giving shade to a whole garden, including the birds of that garden. It is God who makes this seemingly impossible growth possible. Another miracle. Another picture of the Kingdom of God at work in our world.

I’d like to tell you two stories now. Firstly, the story of John & Barbara. So happens John was a Baptist minister like myself. He & his wife, Barbara, visited United Christian Broadcasters, way back in 1992, not long after they had

launched their first Christian radio station in the UK. John asked whether there was an opportunity for listeners to phone in, after listening to these radio programmes, to seek help & prayer. So John & Barbara launched a national prayerline. They started this from a small room without any central heating in the UCB's headquarters, because it was still being built at the time. They had to huddle round a one-bar electric fire... And in the early days, not many people phoned. But that started to change in 1994, when UCB published the quarterly devotional booklet, 'Word for Today'. How many prayer requests are received by the UCB Prayerline today? Around 120,000 every year... From the smallest of beginnings a wonderful ministry of prayer & care has grown...

Now, I would like to tell you the story of Jamie. Jamie is a teenager from a Christian family. In 2020 he made a NY's resolution to 'Do more about climate change'. I think at this point, Jamie had already been doing things to care for God's creation. He wrote a letter to the council, asking for them to provide free recycling bins. And he asked his school to include more about climate change in their lessons. The following year, he helped his mum & dad to write this book by the Bible Reading Fellowship, called 'Changing the Climate'. The book is described in the form of a simple recipe: (READ BACK COVER) Jamie took seriously the example of Greta Thunberg, who herself wrote a book entitled: 'No-one is too small to make a difference'... In the chapter in this book about food, the first thing Jamie recommends we do is simple: Give thanks each mealtime for the food we eat. One other thing Jamie did was to work with three other young people in his church youth group to cook a simple meal. This raised £500 for a charity, helping starving people in Yemen.

Hopefully the stories of John & Barbara and Jamie show us how God can do amazing things, **even through us**... When we pray for God's help & ask God to use us who knows what will happen?... God will grow us spiritually, when we pray & step out in faith & seek to bless God's good creation. As Jesus shows us, we each of us have much to learn by listening to God and by listening to God's creation. God calls us each to cultivate our own ground, both physically & spiritually. To nurture healthy growth & a rich harvest by following the example of Jesus and walking in step with God's Spirit.

We are all part of God's 'dream team'. God has much in mind for each of us to do, to bring blessing to all of God's creation, this day, this week & in the coming weeks. What is God dreaming for you this week, I wonder? Thanks be to God -

for the miracle of Jesus, for the miracle-grow of the Kingdom of God, in us!
Alleluia!