

13<sup>th</sup> June Sermon 2021. 2 Cor 5:6-17. Mark 4:26-34.

*Lord, may we grow in trust and faith in you as bringer of your kingdom. Amen*

When I was a kid, I used to live not far from the Keighley Rugby Ground, and I remember going quite often whilst my Mum was cooking the Sunday Roast. I think, looking back, she probably persuaded my Dad to take us kids out to give her a few hours peace. So, Dad took us to see Keighley Cougars.

I still don't understand all the rules or tactical positionings of the players. I remember though finding the game so rough and physical and could not ever imagine myself ever wanting to play it.

I remember deciding that what is called the 'scrum' looked the only safe place to be, but it still made me feel uncomfortable putting myself in their shoes, being all linked up in such close proximity to one another. I know they're a team but surely they can't like being in a scrum, what if they just particularly don't like or agree with everyone in their scrum? Also in the scrum, they are linked up with some of the opposition too. I remember thinking that given a free choice, I would just rather stay in the scrum anyway and not have to 'do' any of the actively risky stuff at all!

Yet now that I am a Christian who does, well tries to, see the God that I have faith in, wherever I am, not just when inside church or during a worship service, I realise that the scrum is there with the intention that it has to break, disperse, and each individual member of the team within it serves their purpose, tactically playing to their strengths, talents and belief, in the hope they will win through.

Hopefully more strengthened and ready for what is to come, because of the unity and closeness of the team, even if they are also so closely linked to their opposites. Even if, as individuals, they differ or disagree in other aspects. They are to put all that secondary to reach their common goals.

Could you imagine what would happen in rugby if the team did just stay in the scrum, and didn't use their time spent there wisely to gain control of the task ahead, in acceptance that when they do disperse it is not going to be easy at all, but it is their purpose to do their own active bit to collectively win through.

Accepting also that they could only win by one pass at a time, one tackle, one conversion, one drop goal, one penalty goal, at a time! The team know that staying in that scrum is not going to gain favour or respect from the crowd who have high expectations of them to do what they are supposed to do, what they are there to do.

Some people view God as just being like the referee, who lays down the controlling rules and regulations, only relevant whilst we are taking notice, like rugby crowds during 80 minutes of rugby for example.

We may be conveniently treating God in that way ourselves, relevant only during a 60-minute worship service, and forgetting why it is we join our church 'scrum' in the first place. Forgetting why we are to accept the challenges that comes with faith, as we often find ourselves in such close proximity to those who have very different ideas to ours.

Like the rugby scrum, we are a team, gathered to continue to be good stewards of our buildings and fabric, finances, maintenance of grounds, following rules and regulations, safety, especially so during times of pandemic.

What many people don't see is that we also seek to follow something so much bigger and so much more mysterious than a temporary manager or referee. We seek to see God not just central whilst we are in our scrum together, or whilst we are taking notice of him, but so much bigger, as being the provider of all that is around us, in every aspect of our earth and our lives.

God's kingdom is so big and so beyond our own understanding, in fact, that we turn to Jesus Christ to connect us, to reveal more of an understanding of God to us, in faith.

As Mark reminds us today, Jesus doesn't give the crowds all the answers either, he hopes that well after the crowds have dispersed, going their own individual ways, that they actively include what he has said in their thoughts and lives long afterwards. But he trusts in his Father God to continue his work in them, even unseen, after Jesus has sown even the smallest of seeds.

Jesus reminds us that we can be comforted, consoled by the fact that the earth is full of life, plants, natural growth that mysteriously survives even without us humans tending to it at all.

We are to see God as sole owner of all that, not just a temporary manager only there whilst we attend worship or other gatherings with only our own Christian team. We are to see ourselves as stewards of it all, the bigger picture. It isn't easy for us to remember to think that way and to let it control our actions.

Which is why Jesus reminds us of the small mustard seed, contrasting it with what it is to become, small beginnings in faith becoming large enough to nest birds in its shade. Verse 27, 'night and day, while he's asleep or awake, the seed sprouts and grows, but he does not understand how it happens'.

It isn't disregarding the hard work of the farmer who has actually watered, fertilised, weeded, etc, the point is that, even with our extensive knowledge of cultivation and growth of plants, far more than those early farmers had, there is still mystery there as to the success of natural life growth, that we don't have all the answers to. If a farmer did nothing else but sow seeds then much of it would still grow to maturity, just as seeds do without any human intervention at all. We see that around us all the time, billions of seeds do that.

It is trust, to not forget to have faith in God in the ordinary, everyday life, night and day, that even the smallest of seeds like the mustard seed has the potential power to grow from a source of mystery even. It grows slowly and requires patience and is not an instant fix or impatient demand to see the full harvest all at once.

The kingdom of God is like that slow and steady growth, the results of our faith may seem too ordinary for some who are looking solely for that huge dramatic and instant miracle. We are to see the smaller every-day ordinary miracles, in every family who attend their loved one's baptisms, confirmations, weddings, even their funerals as we have faith in heaven beyond life here.

The mustard seed miracles are in our worship, our homegroups, our fundraisers, especially in our community events, seen especially in our outreach, our giving. They are in our phone conversations, our YouTube, our activism. Especially in our prayers. Individual small miracles, each just as small as mustard seeds, but each one is powerful growth, God's growth. God being present.

We are there to sow even the smallest of seeds, and to use our scrums, to gain strength of play again, with God central within them. To further reveal how to grow our knowledge of God's kingdom that bit bigger.

However, when our crowd disperses to go in separate ways, we are to remember to trust in God's constant activeness in not only our own lives, but in the bigger growing kingdom. Even if we can't see it or fully understand it.

We are to remember to draw on what our gathered times with God and with one another reveals to us. We will still say, 'life is a mystery', but in faith we can see more of the small ordinary patient growth, revealing more of God's spiritual truth in our hearts and minds.

What is your part to play when separated from the scrum and your team? What is your part to play during those times in your scrum? What small miracle seed in faith could you actively plant, and where?

Amen