

Watching the seed grow

Last week I spent quite a lot of time trying to tame the wilderness that is my garden. At the beginning of the week I cleared a largish area in the front. I have neighbours who are meticulous in their gardening and no weeds seem to dare to grow in their gardens, ever. Consequently, the weeds seem to get the message and infest mine instead.

However, the parable of the growing seed, which we read from the first part of the gospel today, has some encouraging words. Here is a man scattering seed and then letting the seed get on with it. Night and day the seed sprouts and grows. The man does not know how. All by itself it grows: first the stalk, then the ear, then the full grain. As soon as it ripe the farmer puts the sickle to it and harvests the grain.

(Nowhere in this parable is the word “weed” mentioned! Instead, the focus is on growth.)

There are 3 different components: the sower; the seed and the ground.

The first, the sower. This is not a particular person. The parable doesn't focus on him but on the seed that is planted and its growth. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows. The man doesn't know or understand how it happens, he just knows it does. Growth is taking place by the interaction of the seed and the ground and the man is a bystander.

The second component is the seed itself. This is a bit confusing because this parable follows the parable of the sower at the beginning of the chapter. In this previous account the parable is concerned with the sower and the four different types of soil; but here the emphasis is now on the word of God and how it is received.

In this second parable the seed represents the Kingdom of God itself. The field is brown and lifeless when the seed is sown but as the weeks pass, the ground turns green and the plants grow higher and higher until the field is a sea of green. The seed grows and will continue to multiply until the final harvest, which is to come. It reflects everybody who hears God's word, listens and acts upon it and spreads the good news of the gospel to others.

The third component is the ground where the seed is planted, that has all that is necessary for the seed to grow. It is the medium from which the seed gains the nutrients in the soil, the water and the heat of the sun, all of which promote the growth of the seed into a green and living plant. Growth is an automatic process if

all the components are present. We are this medium; we must be prepared to accept the word: to understand it and to allow this understanding to grow.

The second part of the reading concerns a different seed; the mustard seed. Now the mustard seed is proverbially tiny. In Matthew's gospel we read, "Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

The mustard seed that we know, as in mustard and cress, is tiny, but the garden herb that grows in Palestine commonly grows to a height of 3 metres which helps in understanding Jesus' words. He was describing to the disciples what the kingdom of God is like. He says, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it. It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade."

Of all the seeds that were sown at that time in the East, and all the seeds that are sown today to produce edible products, the mustard seed was, and still is, the smallest. In fact, in Jesus' day, there was an expression "small as a mustard seed," to describe something insignificant, tiny and unremarkable.

What does this mean to us today? We know that when we sow a seed it will usually grow and eventually it can be harvested if conditions are right and it has been nurtured. But, with the coming of Jesus Christ, we have the unconditional promise of our place in the kingdom of God; that is our destiny. We are given a guide and a Saviour to carry us in faith from one life on earth to life eternal.

Jesus taught the disciples that, in Him, the kingdom of God has come to earth.

As it says in Mark's gospel, "With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to those who had come to hear him, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything."

And so we, his followers, his disciples, have also become the seed which will grow and spread the word as we try to grow in faith through the message of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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