

# Sunday Homily

## SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

13 JUNE 2021

YEAR B

"With what can we compare  
the kingdom of God?"

Mark 4:30

### Illustration

There's a traditional rhyme which begins, "For the want of a nail the shoe was lost, for the want of the shoe the horse was lost..." The rhyme goes on to tell how the kingdom was lost because of the lack of that horse in the army that would have made all the difference in the crucial battle. One nail missing, and a kingdom is overthrown. The poem expresses the same conventional wisdom as the saying, "Take care of the pennies and the pounds will take care of themselves." These sayings warn people not to look only at the big issues, but to keep an eye on the small things of life.

### Gospel Teaching

Jesus too recommends that we look carefully at the small things of life, but for a different reason. For Jesus, paying attention to small things is not a way to keep a grip of our money, or to make sure that we win wars. Rather it is because it is in the little things that we can see God's kingdom.

The kingdom of God starts very small. That is the essence of the two parables Jesus tells in today's Gospel reading. The kingdom is like seed scattered on the ground which is tiny to start with, and appears to do nothing at first. But eventually, if the farmer is patient, it grows into a substantial harvest. Or the kingdom is like an acorn, which disappears into the ground but, given time and patience, grows into a huge tree.

These are familiar parables, so familiar that perhaps we forget the shock with which they might have been greeted by Jesus' first listeners. Jesus is talking about the kingdom of God, the rule of God. What would we expect the rule of God to look like? Where would we look for it? In our time we are not used to being ruled by an absolute monarch, but the people of Jesus' day were. Their king was Caesar, the Roman emperor, ruling from distant Rome through his governors, with efficient authority. Caesar was the equivalent of a god, and indeed at some times was worshipped as a god. His power was absolute, and obedience was demanded. His presence was attended by much pomp and ceremony. He lived

in luxurious palaces, and enjoyed rich food and fine wine from gold vessels. The people of Jesus' day knew what a kingdom looked like. It was big and grand and powerful.

And if that was true of an earthly kingdom, how much more true would it be of the kingdom of God? When the ruler of the universe came to reign on earth, how grand and terrible his reign would be. He would be heralded by a multitude of angels, accompanied by flames of fire and crashes of thunder. The earth and sky would shake, and God would appear on the clouds, too splendid to look at.

So Jesus' parables of the kingdom come as something of a surprise. The kingdom about which Jesus speaks is altogether quieter, and smaller. It sneaks up on you like a thief in the night; it lies dormant in the ground waiting to produce a tiny sprout; it hides in ordinary working folk, farmers, shepherds, fishermen, housewives, as they go about their everyday business. God's reign is present everywhere, hidden, tiny, ordinary. It doesn't arrive with thunder and lightning for all to see. If you want to find it you have to look, very carefully and very closely, at little things.

## Application

We live in a world that is fixated on size and success. Businesses have targets for growth. The growth of the national economy is carefully encouraged. Much of our world is ruled by huge multinational conglomerates. Churches are anxious about declining attendances. In the midst of this, Jesus' words encourage us to look for God at work in the little things: small acts of love and generosity that grow into warmth and community; the everyday kindnesses of people who serve others. Small groups of faithful people whose prayers spread over their neighbourhood. Sunshine and rainbows, buttercups and sparrows, small signs of God's creative will.

It takes commitment and patience to see in these things signs of God's reign. But it matters that we do. God's kingdom will come, Jesus said, but it is also already here. It is the task of his people to look for the signs, and to nurture them, until the whole world sees God's glory and God's love.