

Sermon preached by the Revd Chris Wedge 17 June 2018 (**Mark 4:26-34**)

On Monday I was in the Cathedral with some of the children from our parish school. Unprompted one little girl said to me 'I think I'm going to be confirmed'. Although I was delighted I wanted to know more 'Why is that?' I said. 'Because I want to draw closer to God and to live in His Kingdom' came the reply. I was glowing inside and I simply smiled and said 'good'. A few months ago one of our very tiny children said to me at the altar after I had blessed him 'Be careful Chris (he said pointing to the wafers I was holding), don't drop that, it's Jesus, it's very precious'. I tell you these two stories not because I think they are cute but because they are unexpected. I don't think we expect children, and especially very young children, to speak in such a profound and holy way. Those two conversations blew my mind because I knew that I was talking to people of great faith, to people who know God and love Him and one was under five and the other under 10. They were surprising conversations.

I love this church and I think in many ways being Rector of St. Mary's is the easiest job I have ever had. Everything we do seems to turn to gold, every new thing we start seems to be well received, and it's such a blessing being part of a growing church filled with such an obvious sense of hospitality and welcome. Every week new people join us, we are a diverse church with young and old alike, men and women, singles and married couples, straight and gay, black and white. This year we will have almost thirty confirmation candidates (the largest number for decades), we have three ordinations this summer (which is unheard of) and so the list of blessings goes on and on. All of this growth and inclusivity both surprises and delights me.

God came to earth in human form, he showed the depth of his love for all humanity by healing the sick, including the outcast and he overcame death by dying on the cross and rising to new life. I am surprised that God did all of this for me and for you.

Day by day we celebrate the Eucharist, we remember the night before Jesus died, I get to hold God in my hands and I bring down the Holy Spirit on bread and wine and Christ is here, week after week we are invited onto holy ground where heaven and earth meet. I find this more than surprising.

In our Gospel for today Jesus gives us a few more surprises. He tells us about the Kingdom of God and explains that it's like seed liberally scattered, it takes root and grows here there and everywhere. The seed cannot be stopped just like the reign of God. The seed takes root in the most surprising of places. God's generous and loving rule cannot be kept out; there is no corner of the world untouched by God. God is present in every place, at every time with all people. This is not an easy concept to get your brain round. Like the seed, God breaks through in the most surprising of places with the most surprising of people.

Just think for a minute about the places you have been this week. God was there with you, breathing his love, his forgiveness and his acceptance on you.

And then we are told about the mustard seed: the tiniest seed that grows into a big strong tree. How can this seed be transformed into such a large tree? How can such an insubstantial beginning flourish into such abundance?

These two parables are showing us that life with God is full of surprises and that we too are invited to grow and to flourish. Our growth in faith and holiness has nothing to do with our own effort. We don't wake up one day and decide to be holy. The growth in our souls and the transformation of our lives is all the work of God. It is never by our own efforts that we enter more deeply into the presence of God. The seed grows by God's grace, the seed doesn't strive earnestly to become a tree but it is through the gift of God that it grows. And so it is with you and I. We grow in holiness because God wills it. The church grows in size and depth because that is God's gift. Your soul and mine are transformed because God loves us without limit or condition.

So how's it going for you? What's happening in your pilgrimage of faith? Are you growing in prayer? Is your life more filled with peace and joy?

The Kingdom of God is not a place; it is not a set of intellectual propositions that we have to strive to understand. The Kingdom of God is a promise and an invitation. It is a promise to life in all fullness and it is an invitation to personal transformation. When we pray 'Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done' we are inviting the God of change and transformation into our lives. If we really believe those words then we are asking God to bring about surprising changes in us, we are accepting the invitation to love deeply, to see clearly and to act boldly.

If you are feeling slightly worried, if you are feeling somewhat nervous and if you are wondering what sort of a risk all this implies then good – you are really engaging with the surprising promises of God.

All of this is Good News and all of this is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and it is for you and the person sitting next to you and your neighbour and your colleague and the stranger in the street. And the best bit of all: God does all the hard work. God is the one who transforms, God is the one who brings growth, and God is the one who delivers his promises.

If you dare, join me in a prayer full of surprises: Lord God of all creation, touch our lives here and now, heal our hurts, renew us in love and inspire us to follow you with joy and delight. Loving God we say yes to your invitation to be transformed, we say yes to your invitation to know you and we say yes to turning our lives away from darkness to live in your glorious light. May your Kingdom come, and your will be done. **Amen.**