

Dear Friends,

Mark 4: 30-32

Jesus is sitting in a boat. The boat is on the lake close to the land. On the shore a crowd has gathered. Jesus is having a conversation with them. He is telling them stories.

He tells them about the mustard seed. He says that it's the smallest seed which becomes the biggest shrub. Actually, he is wrong on both counts. The mustard seed, although small, is not the smallest and it does not produce the biggest shrub. Let's not be too bothered about the details. The point is that something very small produces something very big. Maybe it's not even the size that matters. We are being asked to notice not that the growth is big, but that the growth is surprising.

The mustard seed is not only small, it is also common. There are lots of them. The shrub that grows from the seed is not only big, it is also useful. It produces large branches where birds find shade and make their nests.

God's life is like that, sometimes it might start in ways which seem small and modest. But it grows into something valuable and important, something which is helpful and useful. For example, God can take a little lunch of five loaves and two fish and use it to feed a huge crowd so that all eat and are filled. In the same way, God can take little you with what you may see as your modest gifts and God can work with you to perform wonders and bless thousands.

There are many people who are like the mustard seed. They have so much to give, but they don't receive the attention they deserve. They may even be made to feel as though they are surplus to requirement, as though they are not needed or wanted.

In 1970 Zoe Moss wrote an essay with the title "It Hurts to Be Alive and Obsolete". In it she wrote about her experience, including that of ageing. She describes the pain of feeling forced to be invisible, of feeling that she is supposed to fulfil her small functions and then disappear. Actually, when she wrote this, she was only forty-three, so she wasn't yet in later life. But, if she felt that then, I wonder if those who are older might sometimes feel something like it. In Psalm 92 we hear God's view of older people. In it we read of those who are planted in God's house. It says, "In old age, they produce fruit; they are always green and fertile". They are fresh, verdant and flourishing.

You may feel as though you are just a little mustard seed, but you are full of God's life and flourishing energy. You produce fruit, fruit that is delightful, refreshing, and useful.

So, Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God". Trust that God's life is growing and being fruitful. It may start off small, but it will grow into something valuable. The good work that God has begun will be completed. All shall be well and all shall be well and every kind of thing shall be well.

God bless you,

Tony