

## Bennochy church: 17<sup>th</sup> June 2012

Have you noticed recently just how quickly the weeds are growing? I hoed an area of the garden at the manse and very next morning I am convinced the weeds had started growing again! They seem to love this slightly damp, almost humid, atmosphere.

Would it not be great if you had an anti growing spray, for grass and bushes? Apply once and forget for the rest of the year! It would make gardening so much easier and enjoyable.

The context for so many of the parables of Jesus was agriculture. After all that was the kind of society he lived in and earlier in Mark 4 he had told the famous parable of the sower. A man goes out to sow, a common task to the listeners of Jesus. He scatters seed. You can hear them thinking, "I've done that." Life carries on, sleeping and working, and while that is happening, the seeds are growing. We don't tend to watch things grow. It's too slow (weeds!), but leave them for a while and we begin to notice what is happening.

I am sure this man has done all the preparation required to get a good crop, but the key point Jesus is making is this, in spite of any of his hard work and effort, he cannot actually make anything grow. Trial and effort will have resulted in knowledge about the right conditions for growth, but the farmer does not know how it happens. Even with modern science, can we make

anything grow or are we only developing better conditions for growth?

The farmer comes back into the story and his listeners would have engaged with that, harvest has arrived and the corn needs cutting down. Again imagine the crowd, nodding their head in agreement or maybe murmuring to each other their own experiences that year, had it been a good harvest or not.

Underlying this biology is an important theological truth. God's purposes have been maturing through the long history of Israel, almost secretly and un-noticed, but now the time is ripe for harvest. Jesus says to them, the Kingdom of God is like this and is now being fulfilled. He takes the ordinary and points to God.

Do we recognise that in other symbols, the water of Baptism, the bread and wine of communion? What about the church of Jesus Christ as a sign, symbol and foretaste of the Kingdom of God, here and to come? What about us; who do we point to, as we speak and use our talents, skills and gifts?

The Kingdom of God was a highly charged subject and widely anticipated by the Jewish nation. They were after all God's people, and from the time of Abraham were promised salvation from God. For the listeners of Jesus, they were waiting on God's Messiah, the anointed one, who was to come and rescue God's people. Maybe the crowd were getting excited, maybe they were chattering, will the Kingdom come soon? There will be

revolution and our God will powerfully enter our history and save us! I wonder who they thought Jesus was and his connection with this coming Kingdom. Those listening would probably see Jesus and his small band of followers as too obscure to be the seeds of the Kingdom of God. I think we can assume, along with many others, that they did not recognise who he was, and that the Kingdom would indeed be ushered in, very soon indeed.

The Kingdom of God is like this. Like a mustard seed it starts small and expands beyond belief. For the church today, what are the seeds of this Kingdom? Where are the small beginnings? One understanding is to see ourselves as the seeds. So the growth of the mustard tree / bush actually lies in our hands, a responsibility given to us by God.

If there is to be an 'open door' created between the church community and the 'neighbourhoods' where we live and work and interact with others, it is our responsibility to keep those doors open. To be the Kingdom wherever we are, and to help others into the place where God is worshipped, for that is our only unique task; to worship God.

We cannot make things grow. The growth of faith is the work of God alone, but we do have our role, as a farmer creates the right conditions for growth, so we have our responsibility to help create the environment for spiritual growth to take place,

beginning with welcome and hospitality, building friendships and sharing what God means to us.

The Kingdom of God is wider than the church. God is not contained within the church. We do not take God out into the world. He is already there. It is our place and privilege to join with him and work to build his Kingdom on earth.

Lord's Prayer. Amen