

Have you ever found yourself totally misjudging a situation, or people in a situation? Looking back, even though we might see why we did it, yet we know that we got it completely wrong.

I remember when I first came to Dublin as a student, taking part in a 48 hour fast in aid of famine relief in Biafra. We stood with our collection tins at the top of Grafton Street. A variety of people came up to make their donations or shout out as they went past ‘Charity begins at home!’ I have a very clear recollection of two particular people. One lady, in a fur coat, as she prepared to put her sixpence into my tin, questioned me closely as to how precisely her sixpence was going to be spent before finally letting it out of her fingers. The other was a young traveller boy. He came up to ask me what we were doing and I began to think in my own mind how I could explain that I could not channel the money in my tin towards him. In the meantime, he reached down into his pocket and he too pulled out sixpence and with a broad grin put it in my tin with a cheery ‘Its not much I’m afraid but I hope it does some good.’ However I may have been able to justify my suspicions, I can see even to this day how grievously I had misjudged that young lad. He was the one, of all those who had contributed to my collection tin over that 48 hour period, who stood out, even to this day, as demonstrating a joyful, sacrificial giving

In our Gospel reading today telling two parables each beginning with an illustration, ‘The Kingdom of God is like ...’ What would have gone through the minds of those who hearing him speak when they heard those words, ‘The Kingdom of God is like ..’ What was their understanding as Jews living in 1st Century Palestine. For them their understanding of the Kingdom would have been of God returning on behalf of his people Israel to re-establish his authority, to break the bonds of Roman rule. Those who expected a Messiah who would come and seize power were to be disappointed..

Jesus instead uses the imagery of the seed, small and insignificant and easily overlooked, yet containing within it all the potential of a great and glorious plant.. Right through the teaching of Jesus, there is an emphasis on the small and the seemingly insignificant, working unnoticed yielding great results. There is the small amount of leaven added to a lump of dough that causes the whole lump to rise. In the first of today's parables we read:

The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how.

I never cease to marvel at the sight of the first appearance of a seedling above the ground as it breaks through the surface and reaches up to the light. In our sophistication we can describe the science, the mechanisms by which this happens but nothing can take away the wonder of it and the delight as we pluck the first of our beans or peas or whatever off the vine.

Then there is the parable of the mustard seed

which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³²yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade

That great tree, with the birds of the air gathering in it picks up a theme from the Book Daniel, where a great tree, providing shelter for the beasts of the field and nesting for the birds of the air is a symbol of a great Kingdom. So the manifestation of the Kingdom of God in all its majesty and power first manifests itself in the small and insignificant, in that which is easily overlooked.

It is here I go back to that memory of the young traveller coming to me and putting his sixpence in my tin, given freely and generously. How is the Kingdom of God to be manifested in the world? It is often in the small and

seemingly insignificant. I could not explain to the lady in the fur coat precisely how her particular sixpence was going to be spent – but somewhere, far away, someone in dire distress was helped. It went towards a medicine for a child, a packet of food for a family, a tent for a refugee. In the midst of war and famine, hope was brought to someone. ‘As much as you did it to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.’

God works through the apparently small and insignificant. So often we feel that the problems are so big and what I can offer is so small that we lose heart. A young boy brought five loaves and two small fishes (a picnic lunch) and presented them to Jesus and a crowd is fed. From the littleness of the seed, buried in the earth, new life breaks forth.

God takes the littleness of my faith, the poverty of my service and works in it and through it to bring light and hope into the lives of others. So in the quietness of this place, let us simply offer ourselves to God in this coming week, that he may take our acts of love and service of one another, in all their weakness and imperfection, that in us and through us his Kingdom may break through in the lives of others.

Look upon our lives, O Lord our God, and make them thine in the power of thy Holy Spirit; that we may walk faithfully in thy way, faithfully believing thy word, and faithfully doing thy commandments; faithfully worshipping thee, and faithfully serving our neighbour; to the furtherance of thy glorious kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord.