



Sermon 26th July 2020

The Day of Small Things

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

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The English scientist Michael Faraday was an enormously popular lecturer, as well as a physicist and chemist of the first rank. In one of his lectures in the 1840s, he demonstrated that moving a magnet inside a coil of wire produced an electric current. Move the magnet and current flows, keep it still and the flow stops.

At the conclusion of the lecture, one member of the audience approached Faraday and said, “Mr. Faraday, the behaviour of the magnet and the coil of wire was interesting, but of what possible use can it be?” Faraday answered politely, “Sir, of what use is a new-born baby?”

We, of course, know the answer to the question. Faraday had discovered how to generate electricity. From a simple seemingly useless experiment comes the world we know today. Who would have thought that such a small beginning would lead to such a world dominating force?

The first two parables in our reading this morning say the same thing. A mustard seed is very tiny indeed, yet it grows into a great tree that is useful to birds and people alike. Yeast is only a small ingredient in a loaf of bread, yet it has a power far beyond its size when placed in a batch of dough.

This, Our Lord says, is what the Kingdom of God is like. It begins small but it ends up one of the most important forces for good in the world. If certain things are seen to be true, they will change the world.

In the Western world we don't believe that about the Christian or any other faith. Over the past two centuries there has been a sustained attack on the central beliefs of Christianity. Many now believe that the decline and ultimate demise of the Church is inevitable. The attitude seems to be, “Would the last one out turn off the lights.”

Yet this need not be so at all. I want to share three things with you that lead me to this conclusion.

1. Lorraine and I have been privileged to travel all over NZ visiting with churches and leaders that are part of our network. Everywhere we have found people praying for NZ. One prayer meeting in a tiny country town had people driving for an hour to get there and an hour back. We have been much encouraged. God has not given up on NZ yet.
2. The house where the French philosopher who said that he expected to see the end of Christianity has now become the headquarters of the Bible Society.
3. GK Chesterton who was a great apologist for the Faith said once that three times in the last two thousand years people had said that the Church was going to the dogs. In each case it was the dogs who died.
4. Last week we worshipped with one of the Churches in our network and heard a dear old saint tell of how Jesus came and met with her in the past week.

But that is not the end of the matter. The outcome of this is not that the Church as we know it will survive. It may. It may not. Neither does it mean that it will all be easy or plain sailing. I am convinced that it will be

anything but. What we can be sure of is that God will have His way in the end. God's purposes will be fulfilled. Nothing will stop that happening. There are at least two reasons for our confidence in this.

1. The first is that the stories of the resurrection in the New Testament are true. Many have tried to show over the past two centuries that the resurrection did not happen or could not have happened. Scholars have tried to demonstrate that the NT documents were all written long after the events they record. The stories of the resurrection are later inventions to explain the sense of Jesus' continued presence with the people of God. The reality is the reverse. The continued experience of Jesus being with us is real because He is alive now. The first disciples met with the same Jesus after He had been crucified, died and was buried. They told true stories of what happened to them.

2. The second depends on us. God has given us the awesome compliment of inviting us to join with Him in His plan of saving the world. Our obedience to Him makes a difference. We the people of God are called to join with each other in producing a community that looks and feels like a little foretaste of heaven. When anybody walks in here, they are supposed to sense something different about us. Let me tell you two stories:

There is a retreat house in Wales called Ffald y Brenin. (It's pronounced Fal [as in pal] de Brenin). Visitors are often shown around the facilities and on one occasion one such visitor kept telling off-colour tasteless jokes. The manager was getting more and more distressed as the tour continued. They came to the chapel and as the visitor stepped over the threshold, he fell on his face crying out to God for mercy because he was a foul-mouthed man. No one had said or done anything. The presence of God was such that no one needed to.

An older man of around 80 came. He had been sent by the young people of his church. Towards the end of his stay he remembered that the young people had asked him to go to the great Cross on the property. He didn't think he needed to go but wouldn't be able to lie to them and say he had when he hadn't. So, he went. He stopped at a five-bar gate and could see the Cross close by. He leaned on the gate and heard someone else walking up to him and leaning on the gate beside him. They were so close their elbows were touching, which was a bit uncomfortable. He turned and saw that it was Jesus, who said, "Alright?" He wasn't sure how to address Jesus when he spoke like that, so he said, "Alright." There followed a conversation in which Jesus took him back through his life right to the beginning in Sunday School. At the end Jesus took each answer he had given and made them into a picture with a cross at centre. Then Jesus drew him into the picture and eventually put his hand into the very centre of the man's being and *switched him on!* "All my life," he said, "I knew I was dead. I was successful in my profession and had successful colleagues who were dead. Now I am alive! I have a real story to tell my young people when I get home."

Such are things that can happen when people meet with the Risen Lord. Last time we were here one of the parishioners told me that there were a number of stories that they could tell of our Lord's work in their life. I encouraged them to write the stories and share them with us if appropriate.

We can expect the same thing to happen here again in our worship times. Many already experience this. The parishioner I spoke with is not alone.

This is the place where we can make a difference. I want to invite you to join with me and others this morning to welcome Jesus by His Spirit to meet with us; To walk up and down the aisle meeting with you and speaking to you as one of His people. I invite you to pray for that to happen each time we meet for worship. All we need to say is something simple like, "Lord Jesus meet with us by your Holy Spirit today."

Secondly, would you be willing to write out what you are experiencing during the week or during worship. It is hard for some to come up here and share. Give the stories to Ian and he will read them out for you.

Then let's see what those tiny mustard seeds of prayer and stories does.

What use is one small story? It's such a small thing. But it could have amazing consequences in the hands of the living God.