

Be prepared to be amazed!

[1 Kings 3: 5-12.](#) [Matthew 13: 31–33, 44-52](#)

Go on, admit it. You've listened to a huge list of complicated instructions and your mind has gone into micro-sleep. The person giving you those instructions then says, "Have you got all that?" Yes, you dutifully nod, "Got all that." *"Because it's really important that you follow them to the letter."*

Our Gospel reading concludes with the account of Jesus' disciples dutifully saying, "Yes, we've got all that," after Jesus has told them a whole series of parables. But had they really? I doubt it. For Jesus in an ironic twist uses another parable to address them, of a house-owner constantly bringing new and old treasures from his store – you never finish learning. You can't get "parabled out."

This series of short parables can seem so familiar to us as we hear them again that we can become deaf to them. We may very well have learned them as children. Some of the pictures described, such as the tiny mustard seed becoming a huge tree, have entered common speech.

What we must do is to shake off this familiarity and ask for God's wisdom to interpret them afresh, to appreciate the "new treasures" which he brings to us alongside the old. We need a "discerning heart", just like Solomon in our Old Testament reading.

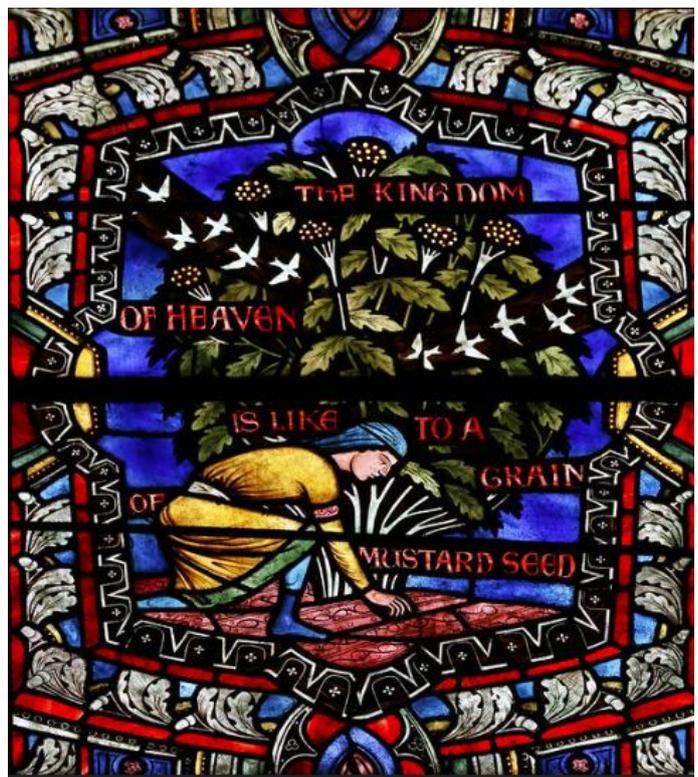
How's your sense of wonder? What makes you go "wow"? Would you find the "wow" in the ordinary things around you, amongst the seeds and shrubs in the garden, the mixing bowls and dishes in the kitchen?

Be prepared to be amazed. Be prepared to have your eyes opened to great mysteries. What is the Kingdom of heaven? What is it? Where is it? Surely there can't be anything more mysterious than that? Surely you would need a hugely academic mind to grasp it? Jesus describes the Kingdom of Heaven through the humblest and most everyday things.

The Parable of the mustard seed describes a surprise waiting to happen. If you look at it only at the point when it the seed planted, you would be deeply disappointed. The surprise is found in the way that the tiny seed is transformed into a big shrub, large enough to support its own kind of ecosystem. The potential for growth is locked up in the seed, waiting to emerge, but the real "wow" factor is when we recall the full process of going from that little seed to the vibrant, spreading mustard tree.

The simple picture of the mustard seed shows the kingdom of heaven is both in the "now" of the seed and the "not yet" of waiting for the mustard tree to be fully grown.

God is the farmer who plants the seed in the field. He prepares for new life, and steadily nurtures it. He is patient. The healthy mustard tree does not emerge overnight. Seasons have to come and go for it to reach maturity.



How patient are we in our faith? Do we desperately anticipate a “magic bean tree”, where growth in faith, both as individuals and in churches is overnight and exponential, rather than wait for a mustard tree? That’s not to say that God doesn’t work in those sudden, seemingly instantaneous ways, as seen at Pentecost in Acts, or in great Christian revivals in Wales in the early twentieth century, or in Billy Graham rallies from the 1950’s into the 1990’s. However, the picture Jesus uses in this parable reminds us of the importance of steady growth, which also sustains others.

Some online pictures of the mustard tree suggest that it is a magnificent thing similar to a Cheshire oak. This is a lovely image, but it doesn’t reflect the truth of the scruffy, scrubby, exuberant mustard tree which Jesus knew. We spend too long attempting to live up to that first picture, when the Kingdom of Heaven is thriving in the scruffy, scrubby exuberance which still enables the birds to find a place to rest and shade for animals beneath.

What does this mean for us in the parish of All Saints’, Thornton Hough? We may be a tiny seed at present, emerging from our lockdown and discovering how we can be church in this new situation, mixing real-time gathering with online and printed contact. We are just beginning to work out how we might resume some of our community activities. There is much to learn, and this can be intimidating.

Yet the Parable of the Mustard Seed reminds us to continue being prepared to be amazed. God works over time, through all the different seasons, through floods and droughts, for the mustard tree to come to its full size. But he starts with the small seed. Let’s ask for perseverance and a willingness to grow; scruffily, messily, exuberantly, but growing to support and encourage others with the good news of Christ’s love for all and in all.

Collect for the Seventh Sunday after Trinity

Generous God,
you give us gifts and make them grow:
though our faith is small as mustard-seed,
make it grow to your glory
and the flourishing of your kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.