



SUNDAY 16 JUNE 2024

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

The Parishes of: Bishop Auckland || Newton Aycliffe & Shildon || Willington
Crook, Tow Law & Wolsingham || Tudhoe || Coundon, Ferryhill & Windlestone

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

11th Sunday of the Year (B): Mark 4: 26-34

I was impressed when I first saw a picture of a desert in bloom, happening seemingly overnight after a spell of rain. I still am impressed. Ordinary growth accelerates in ways not given to other areas of the world when this happens. Despite the joyful sight of the transformation of the desert floor, it somehow seems unfair that this fast-track, colourful change can't be the norm to speed up crops we rely on to feed the world.

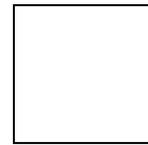
Not only does growth take time, but we take it for granted. How does a seed, little bigger than a full stop on this page, produce something so much bigger? Acorns and conkers, given time, provide us with huge and magnificent trees. You and I started out in life from a gifted fusion of elements miraculously small.

When Jesus chooses parables he holds up a hand for us to stop and think. He requires us to connect with our sense of wonder. Be amused and delighted at the contrast between the size of seeds and what they can produce - and begin to ask questions. Life is about change and preferably healthy change. However you understand the Kingdom of God, he's telling us it's about movement. And movement has consequences.

The Lord communicates in word pictures. We're mostly visual thinkers and using one thing to describe and explain another is helpful. But it's incomplete. The comparison is imperfect. Jesus uses many images to point to the Kingdom of God - to hint at how things really are in God's world. We're used to television stacking multiple images in sequence on top of one another to get the message across - one picture doesn't hack it when rich, jewel-like reality has so many facets.

We shouldn't take things at face value but maybe we often do. Be imaginative. What's happening beneath the surface? God's outlook on how we live is a never-ending exploration of what it means to love. Jesus lives it best. He mirrors the prodigal, self-giving expressive adventure that is the model for us and he can't stop talking about it.

Play with the images Jesus gives. They're signposts. Dare to follow the pictures. We are constantly making our own pictures of how to live and love. Enter the mystery of what God is doing in our lives while we're awake or asleep. The Master is telling us there's a lot happening. Thank God.



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Pope Francis on growing in love

It would not be right to see the call to growth exclusively or primarily in terms of doctrinal formation. It has to do with 'observing' all that the Lord has shown us as the way of responding to his love. Along with the virtues, this means above all the new commandment, the first and the greatest of the commandments, and the one that best identifies us as Christ's disciples: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). Clearly, whenever the New Testament authors want to present the heart of the Christian moral message, they present the essential requirement of love for one's neighbour: "The one who loves *his neighbour* has fulfilled the whole law therefore love of neighbour is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:8, 10). These are the words of Saint Paul, for whom the commandment of love not only sums up the law but constitutes its very heart and purpose: "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself'" (Galatians 5:14). To his communities Paul presents the Christian life as a journey of growth in love: "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all" (1 Thessalonians 3:12). Saint James likewise exhorts Christians to fulfil "the royal law according to the Scripture: You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (2:8), in order not to fall short of any commandment.

- *The Joy of the Gospel—para 161*