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Homily 11th Sunday – Year B

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Very often Jesus uses parables to teach. There are in fact 13 parables in the Gospel of Mark. Parables, in a way, were the “movies”, or “Facebook” or “Twitter” of Jesus’ time. Jesus was skilled at using parables – he didn’t invent “parables” (the rabbis had long used them to teach and explain things to people to drive the point home). Jesus inherited a very memorable tradition. It is visual and also contains a moral lesson. Just as we are so familiar with social media, with Facebook and Twitter, Jesus’ own hearers would’ve been very familiar with the use of parables. And because most of the people of Israel in Jesus’ time were farmers, he used analogies from that world from the farming world. That is how Jesus tries to explain to his hearers what the Kingdom of God is like and how this Kingdom comes about.

I want to suggest today that there are three things that we can reflect upon if we listen carefully to the parable we have just heard.

1. **Small Beginnings:**

So often we are impressed by the glitz, by what is big, by what is large. We tend to despise what is small and unseen, we think that it is insignificant. We tend to think that the little things that we do are insignificant and it’s only those in powerful positions or find themselves often in the media that do important things. And yet Jesus, in this parable, reminds us that the small things that we do day to day can bring about much bigger things – like a big building, just look at any big building that’s been built, it starts by putting one small brick upon another.

Therefore it’s not necessarily those that seem to hog the media space that are doing the significant things, because very often that only lasts a while and it disappears, but rather it’s those who do the daily build slowly, who ultimately do what is most significant.

Seeds need darkness, they need isolation, they are covered by the earth to germinate – something small, something hidden, something anonymous, so to speak, has got tremendous potential and power. And so too for us. We bring about the kingdom of God when we choose to do the small things consistently every day, no matter how insignificant or anonymous they feel. It is those little things that we do daily that are the very building bricks of the Kingdom of God among us.

2. **Outcomes and results:**

The second thing is so often we are focused on outcomes. We hear this in education, outcomes based education, or results. We want results and we want them fast. We live in an age of “instant” products, think about it, instant noodles, instant photos, instant soup, instant relief of a headache. We forget that certain things cannot be rushed. To grow to maturity as a person cannot be rushed – it’s the journey of a lifetime. To build good relationships cannot be rushed, they are done or they are built over a long period of time.

And so in the parable Jesus tell us that the farmer does his part – he sows the seed. And then he has to wait for the seed to germinate, and for the seed to grow. And he is completely powerless when it comes to that germination or that growing.

Our efforts alone do not bring about the Kingdom of God – we have to wait for God to do the work. That calls us to a deep trust and faith that God is working in our lives to bring about the Kingdom inside of us and amongst us. And so today we are invited to examine how well we do our part, how well we do the sowing. But we are also invited to trust, and to have faith, that God is bringing about the kingdom right here and right now amongst us. Therefore we have to be patient – something we often struggle with when we live in an instant world! Because the Kingdom of God is not instant, it grows slowly within us and among us and we simply have to do our part.

3. Be open to God's Surprises:

The third and final thing is to reflect on the God of surprises. It's interesting, if you read the second little part of that parable, to notice how surprising the Kingdom of God can be. Jesus surprises us when he tells us about the Kingdom of God. You see, very often, so often, we think we have the Kingdom of God all worked out. We think that we can do some sort of mathematical sum, that we simply have to do something and this will be the result.

This is not how the kingdom of God works. Jesus tells us that small little seed grows to be one of the biggest shrubs. Who would've thought that a small seed can become one of the biggest shrubs? And therefore we have to constantly be conscious of being open to the God of surprises, and not thinking we have the Kingdom all worked out, we have the way of God's working all worked out. Because when we do that, it's not the God of our fathers, Abraham and Isaac that we believe in, but rather a God that we have constructed for ourselves.

Therefore Jesus invites us, he invites those that hear that parable, to be open to whatever surprises God gives us.

Catholics especially sometimes think that we have the insider view, somehow we have it all, and we know it all. There's that story that I'm sure many of you have heard of St Peter giving somebody a tour of heaven. And they pass a huge gate, and they're not walking in Sandton remember, this is heaven, and some asks who is inside there behind that gate. And St Peter says "Shhh... that's the Catholics – they think that they are the only ones who make it into this place."

It's dangerous to think we have the Kingdom of God all tied up. The Kingdom of God is always bigger, it is always more than we think. And so, in this parable Jesus invites us to an openness to the God of surprises, who always does things differently to the way that we think.

Let's pray today, as we celebrate this Eucharist together, as we move back into ordinary time, that this parable of Jesus will help us to see that it is in the small beginnings that great things start, that it is through our deep faith and trust in God, our patience after doing our part, that everything else is at God's initiative. And let's pray for the willingness and openness to the God of surprises, who always wants to drop something we don't expect into our laps.