

# Parish of Central Exeter

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Trinity 13 June 2021

**Be joyful, keep the faith, and do the little things.** (St David, 587)

*Our reading this morning compares the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed. The reflections on this reading are from Richard, and the intercessions are from Caroline. Many thanks to you both.*



Welcome everyone.

## Preparing for worship

We gather:

a community of faith in God's subversive world.

We gather to celebrate

that no darkness can extinguish light,

to remember

that love will always be more powerful than death,

and to trust that

peace will always be stronger than violence.

We gather,

people of faith in the light of God's world.

Welcome to worship.

*(written by Cheryl Lawrie and posted on [hold this space])*

## Opening Prayer

Called to be branches in Christ's body,

**we yearn to be connected to the vine.**

Called to be mustard bushes offering shade to God's creatures,

**we search for places to plant the seeds of faith.**

Called to be growing with God in the midst of this world's painful questions,

**we seek God's nurturing presence.**

*(written by Katherine Hawker. Posted on Liturgy Outside. )*

## Gathering Hymn

'God is working his purpose out', sung here by the Choir of Manchester Cathedral. Words are on the screen. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cr3goa3DXsw>

### **Prayer of Confession**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
we remember with gratitude those people  
who generously sowed the seeds of faith in our lives.

*Pause for a time of reflection*

Above all, we recognize how you have blessed our lives  
with the gift of the Holy Spirit  
so that our faith has miraculously and mysteriously grown.

We confess the times we fail to involve ourselves  
in planting any seeds of faith in the lives of others;  
the times when our personal agendas become more important than yours;  
the times when we have denied others the opportunity to expand their faith  
through our lack of interest or involvement;  
the times when our lives become so entangled with the values of the world  
that we forget what you have said and done and promised.

Lord Jesus Christ, we know that when we become disconnected from you,  
our lives becomes parched and unfruitful and our faith becomes stunted and dry.  
Bless and renew our lives, we pray,  
so that we remain connected to you at all times and in all places,  
strengthening our faith to expand and, growing strongly and vigorously,  
to bear the fruit of your mercy, your love, your undying life. **Amen.**

*(written by Moira Laidlaw, and posted on Liturgies Online.)*

### **Words of Assurance (from Psalm 20, the Psalm appointed for today)**

*Some trust in chariots and some in horses,  
but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.  
They are brought to their knees and fall,  
but we rise up and stand firm.*

**Amen.**

### **An alternative collect for today**

Mighty God,  
to you belong the mysteries of the universe.  
You transform shepherds into kings,  
the smallest seeds into magnificent trees,  
and hardened hearts into loving ones.  
Bless us with your life-giving Spirit,  
re-create us in your image,  
and shape us to your purposes,  
through Jesus Christ. Amen

*(from Revised Common Lectionary Prayers)*

### **Worship music**

'May the mind of Christ my Saviour'. The tune is 'St Leonard', composed by Cyril Barham-Gould while he was living at St Leonards-on-Sea in Sussex. It is sung here by The Scottish Festival Singers. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gE5fOXSymBc>

### **New Testament Reading**

#### **Mark 4: 26-34**

Jesus also said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.'

He also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet 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.'

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.



The Mustard Seed, by Imre Szakács,  
a contemporary Hungarian Artist

## **The kingdom of God... is like a mustard seed**

Putting on one side the quibble of some commentators that the mustard seed isn't the smallest of seeds nor does it grow to be the greatest of all shrubs, this little parable brings to mind two anecdotes.

The first I heard many years ago at an event in Exeter Cathedral in a talk was given by one of the brothers from the Franciscan community of Hilfield, based at Cerne Abbas. It concerns South Africa around the time that apartheid was being legally imposed: a black South African youth was in the garden of his Soweto home, where his mother was hanging out the washing, when a white man came along, and as he passed their garden he courteously raised his hat to the mother, wished her good morning, and continued on his way. Amazed at this unusual behaviour of a white man, the youth asked her mother why the man had politely raised his hat to her. "He's a clergyman," she told him. "In that case," the young man said, "I'm going to become a clergyman too,"

You've probably guessed the pay-off. The young man not only became a clergyman, he rose in the ecclesiastical ranks to become Archbishop of Cape Town. Desmond Tutu. As for the hat-raising white clergyman, that was the anti-apartheid activist Trevor Huddleston, later to become Bishop of Stepney.

Huddleston raising his hat to Tutu's mother was a tiny gesture of courtesy, which quite probably came as second nature to him — his was an era in which gentlemen did raise their hats to women: I remember my grandfather would be constantly doffing his homburg as he walked along the street. But Trevor Huddleston's gesture had an unforeseen major consequence, given Desmond Tutu's subsequent high profile anti-apartheid stance, and the part which both he and many others influenced in turn by him played in the eventual downfall of the apartheid regime. A tiny gesture contributed to a hugely important outcome.

A second anecdote: the American psychotherapist Virginia Satir recounts an episode from early in her career. She belonged to a school of therapy which advocates suggesting to clients small tasks to be practised between sessions to start bringing about the desired change. At the end of the first session with a depressed woman client, Satir had devised what she thought could be a very effective task and had explained it carefully to the woman. Lo and behold, at the next session the woman reported a considerable improvement in her mood over the time since the first session. But when Satir asked her how she had tackled the task which had, Satir assumed, triggered the change, the woman looked blank. She had no memory of being given a task, and hadn't done it. All she remembered was that towards the end of the previous session, Satir had complimented her on how well she was coping with many pressures in her life. So buoyed up by this affirmation, she had left thinking, "Hey, my therapist says I'm doing well! I'm not a failure after all!" which had started lifting her depression. Okay, it's not always that easy! But on this occasion it was not some fancy therapeutic technique which initiated positive change, but a straightforward expression of human encouragement. Almost a throwaway remark, which grew into a significant outcome for the woman concerned and (I assume) her family too.

We rarely know the long-term outcome of little acts of kindness, of courtesy, of encouragement, of neighbourliness, but they are the mustard seeds of our lives and our communities and our nations and our world. Tiny, but packed with the potential to become the kingdom of heaven.

And, since parables cannot be nailed down to one unique meaning which everyone has to agree on, here's a different perspective in a poem by Denise Levertov where she also refers to Matthew 17:20 where Jesus says: "if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there', and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."

### **On the Parables of the Mustard Seed**

Who ever saw the mustard-plant,  
wayside weed or tended crop,  
grow tall as a shrub, let alone a tree, a treeful  
of shade and nests and songs?  
Acres of yellow,  
not a bird of the air in sight.

No. He who knew  
the west wind brings  
the rain, the south wind  
thunder, who walked the field-paths  
running His hand along wheatstems to glean  
those intimate milky kernels, good  
to break on the tongue,

was talking of miracle, the seed  
within us, so small  
we take it for worthless, a mustard-seed, dust,  
nothing.

Glib generations mistake  
the metaphor, not looking at fields and trees,  
not noticing paradox. Mountains  
remain unmoved.

Faith is rare, He must have been saying,  
prodigious, unique –  
one infinitesimal grain divided  
like loaves and fishes,

*as if* from a mustard-seed  
a great shade-tree grew. That rare,  
that strange: the kingdom  
a tree. The soul  
a bird. A great concourse of birds  
at home there, wings among yellow flowers.

The waiting  
kingdom of faith, the seed  
waiting to be sown.

### **Our Small Difference**

We may not be able to confront queens,  
or challenge presidents;  
We may not have the capacity to divert resources,  
or uplift communities;  
We may not have the voice to silence the noise of war,  
or the words to negotiate peace between armies;  
But, as we follow you, O Christ, we are able to do something.

And so, we pray that you would inspire us  
to commit to and act on  
the small difference we can make:

May we bring peace  
through small acts of gentleness  
and reconciliation;

May we bring wealth  
through small contributions  
and collaborations;

May we bring safety  
through small acts of consideration  
and acceptance;

May we bring wholeness  
through small acts of care  
and service.

And in the small ways, O God,  
may our small difference make a big contribution  
to your saving work in our world.

Amen.

*(John van der Laar, posted on Sacredise.com.)*

## **Intercessions**

As we contemplate the mystery of the Trinity we pray to God the Father, God the son and God the Holy Spirit, the Three in one and ultimate Unity.

We pray for the leaders of those nations who are gathered at the G7 summit in Cornwall. The world you gave us is in trouble, beset with problems in urgent need of solutions. The threat of climate change and the ongoing pandemic have demonstrated clearly that we live in one world, and resolutions must be found for all peoples on earth. We are one common humanity, dependant on great decisions these leaders must make. Help them hear wise counsel, listen to the voices of children, use their power to find ways of equalising resources and stopping the wilful destruction of the wonderful planet You created and on which we all live.

### **Lord in your mercy ..... hear our prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ, you came to dwell among us in all humility , teaching and healing, showing us a way to live in harmony with one another. You brought redemption through suffering, dying for us before rising in glory. Help us through grace to overcome our failures, to keep the faith and play our part in striving to follow the example you left us. Help us to live with care for our neighbours, with gratitude for the many blessings we enjoy and give us the courage and resolve to speak out against injustice. Prompt our generosity and remind us that we are all your children living in your world.

### **Lord in your mercy ..... hear our prayer**

As we seek to serve, as your church and as individuals in whatever ways we can, we pray constantly for the gifts which the Holy Spirit brings, for fire in our souls, for strength of purpose so that good intentions may be realised in action. The inspiration which the disciples received at Pentecost to address each and everyone in their own language broke so many bonds and we need that ability to recognise and break down those barriers which prevent us from truly being your people. Grant us that holy breath which frees creative and sensitive ways of living and brings us closer to You. Help us to remain steadfast with love in our hearts as we strive for your Kingdom on earth

### **Lord in your mercy ..... hear our prayer**

May we offer these thoughts and words to the Blessed Trinity our Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier.

## **The Lord's Prayer**

Loving Creator we honour you,  
and we honour all that you have made.  
Renew the whole world in the image of your love.  
Give us what we need for today,  
and a hunger to see the whole world fed.  
Strengthen us for what lies ahead;  
heal us from the hurts of the past;  
give us courage to follow your call in this moment.  
For your love is the only power,  
the only home, the only honour we need,  
in this world and in the world to come.  
Amen.

Paraphrased by Sarah Dylan Breuer

## **Affirmation**

It takes little faith to see the sacred in the extraordinary.

To have faith the sacred is in the ordinary, though,  
takes courage to believe the mundane can be enough;  
that grace can emerge  
even through the dull,  
the slightly disappointing,  
the not quite right,  
not quite as we intended,  
not really what we hoped;  
the clumsy,  
the awkward,  
and the imperfect.

Let your act of faith be  
to let what you do be enough.

Let what you do be enough...

*(written by Cheryl Lawrie, and posted on hold this space.)*

## The Peace

If alone, smile and hug yourself (God does). If otherwise, share the Peace as appropriate.

## A short Spiritual Communion

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', even when we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves.



Lord, have mercy.  
Christ, have mercy.  
Lord, have mercy.

O God,  
help me to trust you,  
help me to know that you are with me,  
help me to believe that nothing  
can separate me from your love  
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## An offertory prayer

*We may not be in church, but we can still offer ourselves and our talents to God.*

Blessed are you, God and creator of the universe,  
as we offer you our activities, thanksgivings and our life.  
We present ourselves, and our world, as we are and as you can make us,  
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours,  
and of your own do we give you. Blessed be God for ever.

*Because there is no Breaking and Sharing we can have only Spiritual Communion with Christ. I'm sure you can find a way to use a few minutes of silence or conversation to enjoy this, and make it a sacramental moment.*

*As we prepare for communion you might like to listen to Nigel and St David's Choir singing 'Wait for the Lord.'*



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M89oWjtOk&feature=youtu.be>

*Giving thanks for Christ's death and resurrection you may wish to say*

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,  
for all the benefits you have given me,  
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.  
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,  
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.  
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,  
may I know you more clearly,  
love you more dearly,  
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

### **Post Communion Collect**

Loving Father,  
we thank you for feeding us at the supper of your Son:  
sustain us with your Spirit,  
that we may serve you here on earth  
until our joy is complete in heaven,  
and we share in the eternal banquet  
with Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Commission & Benediction**

You call us to be  
your light  
in the darkness,  
your voice  
in the wilderness,  
your hope  
for the hopeless.

You give us  
strength  
in our weakness,  
peace  
and gentleness,  
words  
and boldness,  
to proclaim  
more of you  
and of us, less.

*(by John Birch, and posted on Faith and Worship.)*



May the blessing of God fall on our community,  
May it be a safe place,  
full of understanding and acceptance,  
where you can be as you are,  
without the need of any mask  
or pretense or image.

**Amen.**

*(posted on Third Space. <http://third-space.org.uk/>)*

### **Closing Hymn**

'Make me a channel of your peace.' The words are attributed to St Francis of Assisi.  
The version here is a cartoon, with St Francis as the principal character.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRyqyyhwTnM>

