

“Less of me, more of Christ” (Mar 4:26-34)

And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out 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 without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

We have a very serious business to discuss today. Very serious. About building of God’s Kingdom. Do you have a plan how to bring people to Christ? Do you have a strategy how you are going to reach those who are still far from Christ? What activities are you planning to do to achieve your goals? M? Do you have a strategy? Do you have a plan?

This is how sometimes even we as Christians think about the Church, about the Kingdom of God. How *we* are going to build it. How *we* are going to help the Triune God to save this world.

Today we read two of Jesus’ parables where He spoke about the Kingdom of God, about how it is built and with what we can compare it. What Jesus explains in these parables are truly liberating for us Christians. His words contain so much encouragement, which is so needed for us in our times, in our culture.

Let’s take a look at each of these parables in turn and see what we can learn from them. Jesus said: **“The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”**

The Kingdom of God is ... as if a man scatters seed. What kind of parable is this? What kind of picture is Jesus portraying. Very insignificant. Very simple. Very usual and down to earth. Nothing splendid. No glory at all...

A man scattering seed. Look at Jesus Himself – what kind of glory do you see? There is nothing extraordinary in Him. Sure, we say, He is true man and true God. But what did people of Jesus' time see?

A man. As one of us. This is how Isaiah the prophet described Jesus. "He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not." (Isa 53:2-3)

Jesus' incarnation, that is, the Son of God becoming a man, seemed as insignificant to our eyes as this parable. He was just a man. Just a man. What a big deal! He wasn't even borne in a noble family.

And this Jesus' parable is just like that. No majesty. No beauty. Nothing to esteem. Nothing to wonder about. The Kingdom of God. We can see in these words of Jesus that God is among us in a very modest way.

May be it would have worked better if God had come in clouds and fire, with a loud sound of trumpet, shaking the earth, then people would have paid more attention to Him? Actually, He had already done it.

At the Mount Sinai. This is exactly what happened. Clouds, fire, the earth shook, powerful sound filled the air. So what? What good did it do? Just a few weeks later the same people who heard God speaking to them, decided to build a golden calf.

And we'll see Jesus coming in the clouds of heaven in His power and accompanied with the mighty army of angels. It is coming, but for now the Kingdom of God is like a man scattering seed.

What is this seed? Jesus doesn't explain it here, but He explains clearly elsewhere. This seed is the word of God. Christ's message to all nations. He came to deliver to us this strange message that even if we all are born sinful and unclean and justly deserve God's wrath and eternal separation from Him, God Himself has reconciled us with Himself in His Son Jesus Christ.

In Jesus Christ He forgives you all your sins. Whatever you have done. Whatever you have failed to do. In thoughts, words and deeds. The seed is this message of well-deserved judgment and totally undeserved forgiveness.

This seed is scattered on the ground, and this seed simply grows on its own. The precise translation would be – automatically. The earth produces by itself. Automatically. The blade, the ear, and then the full grain.

You see, we want to be in charge, and to make things happen. But not with the Kingdom of God. Our main task is – to sow the seed. To scatter the word of God. The message the Jesus has brought us.

It is not exciting. I know. No glory. No splendour. No shaking of the earth. No admiration from people. No strategies and plans. No buzzing activities. Simply sharing the message which Jesus sent us to share.

Everyone like results. At least most people do. It is so good to see that your efforts have led to some results. It is not so with the Kingdom of God. We are only sent to scatter the seed. The seed will grow on its own. Without us even noticing.

Because it is God's work. It is His Kingdom. God doesn't give His glory to us. It may appear disappointing for us. We want to do something, we want to build the Kingdom, we want to be in charge. But the Kingdom of God doesn't operate according to our rules, and according to our plans.

But in fact, it is so liberating. It is so good. You are not responsible for what will happen with the seed. The seed itself has this potential to grow and to bear a lot of fruit. You are only responsible to scatter it.

Of course, we need to be careful that what we scatter is the same seed that Jesus left us to scatter. This is where we need to be faithful. We need to do our best taking in Jesus message, so that we can share it whenever we have such an opportunity.

What this message will do, how it will grow in those among whom we scatter it, it doesn't depend on us. That's God's work. Let us leave it that way. That there is less of us and our wisdom, and more of Christ and God's power.

Then Jesus went on telling another parable. **“With what can we compare the kingdom of God?** What is so magnificent and splendid? Think about rock concerts, about footy games, about Melbourne Cup. Thousands and tens of thousands of people. Music, light, money, fame, celebrities, glory and majesty. No... it wasn't what Jesus said.

“It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

Mustard seed. One of the smallest seeds. Sown on the ground. What kind of picture is this? Is this the best way to describe the Kingdom of God? It doesn't even sound like a kingdom. Why would anyone pay any attention to this kind of little kingdom.

So insignificant. So small. Even comparing with our human activities. Look at the Church! Look at these small congregations! They really are like mustard seeds, scattered everywhere. No glory. No majesty. Nothing to boast about. Nothing that would be attractive to the eye.

This is exactly the point that Jesus was making. This is how His Kingdom looks like these days. Small. The smallest among all seeds. No one would desire it because of its appearance.

But, it has the power of God. It has in it a potential much, much greater than you could ever imagine. Whatever insignificant it may appear right now, when it will be fully revealed it will surpass everything.

And it will surprise everyone. We have no idea, we simply can't imagine what God's Kingdom will look like. There will be something familiar. You. You will be there. But otherwise, it will surpass everything we can imagine. This will be your Kingdom. You are heirs of this Kingdom. Co-heirs with Christ.

Mustard seed can **“become larger than all the garden plants and put out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”**

Talking about the birds of the air. In the Old Testament, all the nations are compared with the birds or the air. (See Dan 4:9-2, Ps104:12, Ezekiel 17:23, 31:6). What Jesus is saying in this parable is that the Kingdom of God will surpass everything.

His Kingdom is much, much greater than the greatest empires. Than all the greatest empires, those of the past, and those of today together. For they all are gone and will be gone. But this one will remain forever.

God will gather in His Kingdom a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages... Sure, look around, you don't see right now much of this grandeur and majesty here.

But learn from these words of Jesus Christ to see the Church as it truly is, this everlasting, universal Kingdom where all God's people are brought together. To celebrate and rejoice in this never-ending feast of Christ.

That's your future. That's where you are heading. This is what your Father in heaven has prepared for you. “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.” (1Co 2:9)

With many such parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

Do you really want to understand what Jesus says in His parables? It may not always be that clear. It didn't always make sense to His disciples. How can we understand these parables?

Here is the answer. 'Privately, to His own disciples Jesus explained everything'. This is exactly what happens in the communion of saints, in the Church. Of course, there are many things which are not that easy to understand.

You really need to be in Jesus' presence. So that He can explain you His words. How does Jesus do it? How does He explain His words? He sent His apostles, so that they would prepare the next generation of Jesus' messengers and the next and the next. This is why we have pastors.

So that they can explain in private to their congregations, to each of you the message of your God. This is why we come together, to study the Word, so that through His servants Jesus can explain you everything.

Hearing the Word is so important. Jesus emphasized it. The apostles emphasized it. Paul wrote: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." (Rom 10:17)

For the words of Christ are not simply some kind of information. As Jesus said: "The words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and life." By listening to Jesus, by being in His presence you receive Spirit and life, and His words make you wise.

And the opposite is true as well. If people are not in Jesus' presence, and don't listen to Him, then there is no Spirit, no life and no wisdom for them.

We still live in culture where we can openly gather to listen to our God. We don't know how long this wonderful freedom will last.

So let us make the most from what is given to us, so that we can preserve the Gospel of Christ in our hearts and in our minds for the generation to come.

Amen.