

## The 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Trinity 11am 2021

A mistake we often make is to try and read the New Testament without the light of the Old. I understand all the reasons we let the Old Testament slip out of focus, but really we're missing out. And Jesus, and the Evangelists who recorded His ministry in the Gospels and their hearers and readers *knew* that everything they were hearing and seeing was a fruit of the same vine.

Today, Jesus's parable of the mustard seed echoes that beautiful image of the Prophet Ezekiel six centuries before, today's first reading – the smallest is made the greatest, and made a place of shade and respite for the birds. What a beautiful image: the insignificant and overlooked is made *great* not so it can conquer or curse, but so it can be made a generous host and place of refuge for travelers and strangers. Can you see yourself in this parable looked at that way? This image is made all the more powerful by Jesus deliberately echoing and amplifying the Old Testament prophecy.

And that's just today. Here we are at the Holy Eucharist, yet too often people don't realise that you can't understand half of what's going on here, and why this

mystery is at the heart of the Church's worship and the life of all Christians unless you know the Old Testament. It is back in the Hebrew Bible that we learn of the Passover. That by a sacred meal God seals His promise of leading His people to freedom. It is *this* promise that Jesus completes, makes Himself the Lamb of God, and the freedom not earthly but from sin and death itself. A passage that isn't simply called to *mind*, but made *real* and *present* every Pesach; so Jesus is telling us He is *real* and *present* in every Eucharist: layers upon layers.

Hidden amongst the law-upon-laws of Leviticus is the priests who offered the sacrifice of blood. A life given in sacrifice that cleanses and heals. Ring any bells?

Even earlier, in Genesis, Abraham is entrusted with the ancient Covenant – to be a blessing for all people. The Chosen People were chosen not to *hog* the blessing but to carry it to the ends of the earth. Where can we see this in our calling to be the Church, but Pentecost (celebrated just a few weeks ago). Look around you, we are a global family here at St Marylebone drawn from every place on earth and manner of person, part of the One, Holy, *Catholic* and Apostolic Church. We are a Pentecost People sent to bless the earth, in the footsteps of Abraham.

So you see, in Jesus' story telling today, in His constant drawing on older Scriptures, His fulfilment of the ancient promises and ways, again and again His quoting the psalms to say *everything* that can be said. We need to see where Jesus is speaking *from* if we are to understand what He is *saying*.

And on that note, what about that last mystery in today's Gospel? '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' (Mark 4.34).

Why doesn't Jesus nail these things down? For that matter, why does He pretty much always answer a question with a question? Why doesn't He give us clear answers on the most controversial topics of *our* day?

One answer might be that Jesus is a Rabbi. Rabbis teach through stories. Stories carry for centuries, much longer than answers or instructions. Stories engage and entangle, stories provoke and make room for pondering, stories enlarge vision and enlarge hearts. Here we are, 20 centuries on because of this Jesus who can't be shaken off, any more than He would let us go.

This is our story, right back to Abraham and his blessing, through Exodus and the building and destruction of Temples, on those hillsides of Galilee and the little hill itself where love was proved stronger than death, and death itself was cheated of its power forever. This story, which entangles and provokes us, with His voice gently story-telling us into life through the twists and turns of history.

This is our story – it's older than anything and anyone here, and yet new every morning. To tell this story we have to be *radical* – that is: *radix* - of the roots. We have to be radical and go deep.

To end, a little story, which I think touches on some of the things that have sat together in my words this morning...

a) Small things that become spacious and hospitable. b) How story enlarges, entangles and provokes. c) A blessing to the end of the Earth... I recently zoomed with the Vatican's head for youth work worldwide. Fr Fabio is a smiley, softly spoken Maltese man. He looks more like a provincial bank manager than someone who has spent much of his life running schools in the middle of harsh North African deserts.

Thanks to the Salesians the local children of his last school had decent education for the first time. They were all

Muslim, the Government was Muslim, Christian ministry was illegal and carried a heavy sentence. The school was allowed to offer education but no teachings on the Christian faith, and no invitations to worship. Fr Fabio and his Salesian brothers loved and served for love's sake alone. And it was hard work. 'In the sticks', no escape, little modern amenities, tough kids, tough life. At the end of another long, hot day one of the women from the village who worked at the school asked Fr Fabio: 'Father, why are you here? Why do you do this for us?' He told me his heart leapt: she had *asked*, which means he was totally within the law to explain. To explain that God loves the world so much that He came to dwell with us in Jesus, to open the way to heaven with Him forever, to give us the Eucharist so we can grow in love with Him until that time, so that we can give our lives away in the ridiculous, gracious love with which God gives us life. He could explain it *all*. But then he realised, that any answer he gave would close down the lady's question. Any answer he gave would stop here mind and heart from being opened up to God, because it would be his answer and that would be that. So Fr Fabio tells me he paused, and said: 'I wonder... I wonder... why do you think we're here? why do you think we do this?' and wandered off to Evening Prayer.