

Today' gospel has a rather horticultural theme. Interestingly, the first few verses – the parable of the growing seed – only occurs in Mark's gospel. When Jesus talks of 'the kingdom of God', I take this to mean God's goal for the whole universe – the time when God's will shall be done on earth as perfectly as in heaven – which we pray for in the Lord's Prayer.

This short, 4 verse parable describes amongst other things, the sense of mystery that there is with God – and the often blind faith that's required; the person who had scattered the seed does not know how it is that the seed sprouts and grows – yet they still do it, in the faith and trust that it will grow and yield plants.

Jesus often uses illustrations from growth in nature in his parables, to describe the coming of God's kingdom. Several features of this can be particularly clearly linked to our own spiritual growth as individuals and as a church.

Firstly, nature's growth is often imperceptible. This can make it seem disheartening. But could we actually cope with dramatic and sudden growth or change? Surely that would be very unsettling. We might think 'But I haven't changed or drawn closer to God this past year'. The chances are, that if it has been our prayer and intent, then we will have, deep down. Perhaps through Covid we have developed an inner strength and resilience, or have been more attentive to the needs of others, or have felt an increasing need to pray...

I got a kitten in September. When I look at her, I still see the kitten I've seen day in, day out. I cannot pinpoint a time in which I thought 'she is no longer

'tiny a kitten'. But when I look back at photos, I see and am reminded how she has grown – not only in size, but in confidence and attitude too! It's been a gradual process. Friends who saw her as a kitten and have again been round more recently, have commented the difference that I find it hard to see. Similarly, often other people can see things about us – ways in which we've grown or changed - that we cannot see ourselves.

Growth and change can be so insidious; it can be encouraging to look back over a span of time prayerfully reflect on our journey. We may perhaps notice things as subtle as a shift in attitude, which will enable us to see things more as God does.

Growth in nature similarly calls for patience. God has eternity, but we tend to want things NOW and have instant results! Who hasn't expected a friend to reply to an email, or return a call right away, and become a bit impatient if they haven't? It can feel like an eternity before we see shoots from the seeds or bulbs we planted. They cannot be hurried though! The best we can do, is to prepare the way for them as best we can, be this through clearing the ground of weeds that may stifle them, or preparing the soil to ensure it has the best nutrients so that they grow in the best way they can. Are there things that we need to weed out? How can we nourish our soil, I wonder? Now that lockdown's easing, retreats, times away and quiet days are becoming an option once again, and meeting face to face with a soul friend or spiritual companion is now possible...

Nature's growth is then, a call to prepared-ness. We have to prepare to some degree, to meet God. That is why we are encouraged to keep silence before our services. Similarly, if thoughts are still whizzing around in our

heads, we will find it so much harder to focus on and listen to God; time spent in slowing down and preparing our minds and hearts, is so valuable.

So may we have eyes and ears to see signs of new life and hope in the world around us as we come out of lockdown. May God give us patience to wait on God, and prepare our ground so that we can be clear channels of God's presence to others. Amen