

<b>Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> June 2012 Cathedral, Grahamstown 7.30 &amp; 9.30 a.m.</b>		<b>11<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year B Youth Sunday – Fathers’ Day Baptisms (9.30 a.m. service) Choir School parents’ meeting</b>
2 Sam 1:17-27	Ps 46	2 Cor 5:6-17
		Mark 4:26-34
<b>Sowing seeds for the kingdom of God</b>		

“The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground...” (Mark 4:26)

Today is a land-mark for many in the life of the Cathedral, with several events of significance. Our young people have been celebrating Youth Day, June 16<sup>th</sup>, with people from all over the diocese meeting this weekend up at St Augustine’s – a time to remember the events of June 1976, and the place of young people in our church and society. Today is Father’s Day. We thank God for our fathers and grandfathers. We congratulate all our fathers and wish you – us – well. We also welcome families and children here for baptism (at our 9.30 a.m. service); and we welcome parents of our Choir School choristers, here with us (also at 9.30).

### **Seed – a sign of the kingdom**

Our Gospel reading has two parables or stories of the kingdom of God – sowing the seed. When my parents started up our sheep farm outside Stellenbosch, it was a case of starting from scratch – not initially with sheep, but with sowing the seed. The ground had to be cleared of bush and trees; a house had to be built, sheep kraals erected, the land ploughed – and then we had to plant the pastures to provide food, grazing, for the sheep. My father set us all out with buckets of seed, and we spent days walking up and down the ploughed lands, scattering the seed as we walked. Then we waited for the rains to come and the seed to grow and the pastures to cover over.

The parables in our Gospel reading today are parables of the kingdom of God. What is the kingdom of God? It is the rule or reign of God. It is where God's will is done – as we pray in the Lord's Prayer – “your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

When God's kingdom finally comes, the whole world will be set to rights. When the kingdom of God comes, there will be no more suffering or poverty or cruelty. All our hopes and dreams for a better place, for a better world, are caught up in the kingdom of God. The world as it was created to be; the world as it is meant to be. It is the kingdom of justice and love and beauty. The kingdom of God is God's will, God's vision, God's dream, for the whole world.

Jesus came to announce that the kingdom, the rule of God, was here; his death and resurrection brought in the kingdom; you and I as Christians are called to work and pray for the spread of the kingdom of God until Christ returns in glory. The kingdom of God begins to take shape in our lives when we open ourselves to God, when we ask the Lord to come into our hearts and lives: “For anyone united to Christ, there is a new creation: the old order has gone; a new order has already begun.” (2 Cor 5:17).

## **Seed-planting and waiting for the harvest**

In the first parable, “the kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day...” (Mk 4:26f) until the harvest appears. There is a sense of unhurried, measured passage of time here, the rhythm of the seasons, spring, summer, autumn, winter. Things happen in God's time, not ours. Once the seed has been planted, God will bring the growth. We do what we can – and then it is over to God. God has things in control! Let's not be impatient or worried.

In the second parable, the kingdom of God “is like a mustard seed which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth” yet grows up “to become the greatest of all shrubs...” (Mk

4:31f). The mustard seed is tiny, but when planted it survives under tough conditions, and spreads rapidly. There is also the image, in Daniel and Ezekiel, of the seed that becomes a mighty tree, and in whose branches eagles can nest. Small, seemingly insignificant beginnings, leading to growth and development and great conclusions we might never see, but those who follow after us will enjoy and thank God for what we have planted.

The little acts that result in unexpected miracles of growth and fruit. The small initiative today, the tiny group of people who meet to pray and plan for a way forward. The five or six teenagers and students who are being prepared for confirmation; the ten or eleven people who have been coming, week by week, to the Rooted in Jesus course since last year, the five young people who meet for Bible Study every Friday afternoon – not vast numbers – yet what seed is being planted, sown in their lives? What fruit will we see in years to come? What will the harvest be? God knows. It is God who gives the growth.

These parables are a word of hope and encouragement – hope for those who are discouraged, hope for those facing overwhelming problems, hope in the face of despair and futility, hope in those times when we ask ourselves, “What’s the point?” In the end, the parable says, we shall marvel at the harvest. Despite rejection, despite opposition, the seed sown is moving towards the fullness of God’s kingdom. What we do is not in vain.

## **Sowing seeds for the kingdom of God**

A word of hope and encouragement as we look to the future of our Choir School during this time of transition; or as we look to next year and the future of our Cathedral Student Ministry.

But we do need to sow the seed as we look for funding for our Choir School bursaries; as we acknowledge the immense contribution that Barbara and Wilf Stout have made to the worship and music of the Cathedral over the past four years; as we say welcome to Andrew-

John Bethke as he prepares to assume office as Director of Music – and as we congratulate him on being awarded his PhD. Sowing seeds for the future – sowing seeds for the kingdom.

We do need to sow the seed, prepare for the future, as we pray and think and plan for our student ministry next year, and to ask how best we can encourage its growth.

We sow the seeds of the kingdom as we preach and teach the Christian faith; as we support one another; as we serve people in need; as we do all we can to create a more just social order, when we invest in the lives of children and young people.

God calls us to sow seeds for the kingdom of God, as members of the broader community, and as members of political parties, by working to elect the leaders that we believe will best serve our country, whether at Mangaung, as the ANC gathers in December, or here in Makana – and to hold our leaders to account. What seeds are being sown in people's lives, what harvest will we reap, with poverty and widespread unemployment, especially among young people? What seeds are being sown when there is corruption and abuse of power? What seeds are being sown when so many of our children and young people receive an education that is sub-standard?

I share the concerns being expressed in local media around the Makana municipal budget, including the costly car that the mayor intends to buy; the name change debate and process; the dysfunctional education in some of our schools; a municipality that appears unable to manage its finances effectively and efficiently. Why is it necessary for the Legal Resources Centre to take the national and provincial departments of education to court to force it to appoint teachers to a number of vacant full-time teaching posts in Grahamstown and elsewhere in the Eastern Cape province – why do citizens have to force the authorities to do their job? The harvest of the kingdom of God is seen in things like good governance, and service delivery.

On June 16<sup>th</sup>, Youth Day, we look back to the events of 1976. Years of oppression sowed seeds that resulted in a harvest of anger and protest. What seeds are being sown today, for the future of our community, for the future especially of our young people?

Today, Father's Day, we give thanks for all fathers, grandfathers, parents. Our call is to sow seeds in the lives of our children, through our example, with love and affirmation. A few years ago, on Father's Day, my girls gave me a fridge magnet which says, "Any man can be a father. It takes someone special to be a dad." Fathers, what seeds are we sowing in the lives of our children?

As we bring children for baptism today, God is planting the seed of faith in their lives. Let's make sure, as parents and godparents, and all of us as the community of faith, that we help those seeds to take root and grow.

## **CONCLUSION**

Let's sow seeds for the kingdom of God.