

Sermon for Trinity 2, 13th June 2021

Mother Emma

Readings: Ezekiel 17:22-end, 1 Cor 5:6-10, 14-17, Mark 4:26-34

For the past few years all Church of England Primary Schools have been required to have a Vision Statement, which should be based on or around a Biblical story or teaching.

Those here who are pupils or parents of St Mary Abbots School next door may recognise today's Gospel parable – the Parable of the Mustardseed – as the source of our school's vision and aspiration that with faith and good nurture, the tiniest of seeds may grow over their years in the school into mighty trees, across all aspects of human flourishing.

But this is also a wonderful parable to hear on a Sunday when we welcome three young children into our church family at the start of their Christian journey.

Jesus' parable envisages that tiny seeds of faith may eventually grow and flourish abundantly, spreading like the mustard-tree in today's poster, until they too play their part in the bringing-in of God's kingdom – a kingdom of peace, justice, compassion and self-giving.

This is a kingdom so large and so welcoming that it has room for all those who, like the birds in Jesus' story, seek safety, support and hospitality.

Our first reading, from the prophecy of Isaiah, used a very similar image from nature.

Here the Lord takes a tender sprig from the very top of a lofty cedar, and replants it, so that it can grow into its own mighty tree, bearing fruit and offering generous shelter to the birds who nest in it.

Whether we see faith beginning as a tiny seed or a cutting from another plant, it is the beginning of our own miraculous growth as we turn to Christ and commit ourselves to follow him.

One of the particularly touching features of today's baptism, is that Blythe, Otto and Jamie all have or had grandparents who worshipped regularly here at St Mary Abbots.

Hearing this might inspire us all to share our faith with our own families and godchildren, to see them as the tiny sprig from the tree of our own faith which will slowly grow in confidence, hope and understanding.

Those who are brought to baptism are offered the free gift of God's abundant grace - as they are washed with water and anointed with holy oil, that tiny seed of faith is planted within them, and just as all the created order needs water for life and growth, so **our** prayers and the promises of their parents and godparents will help that seed of faith to grow and develop over the years.

Yet the grace of God is needed throughout our lives.

The Pastoral Introduction to Baptism printed on the inside cover of your Order of Service reminds us that Baptism is only the beginning of a journey – a first step in response to God’s love.

Although we may feel that our spiritual journey is dependent on us, the words of Isaiah, “I bring low the high tree, I make high the low tree” assure us that even when we feel unworthy, God can lift us up – and conversely, if we are overly confident in our own strength without him, we should recall that everything we have and achieve depends on him.

During the service, the children will experience not only the water and the oil, but Blythe, Otto and Jamie will each be given a candle, lit from the Paschal Candle which first flickers into life on Easter Eve as we gather to rejoice in Christ’s rising to new life.

The candle is a powerful symbol of the new life which Christ brings to each one of **us** through the sacrament of baptism, which echoes the Resurrection.

We shall also be re-lighting the candles of their older siblings, to demonstrate to us all that the light of baptism is not something to be forgotten, but to be kept alight within us.

As our reading from the Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians assured us, “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”

Blythe, Otto and Jamie may still only stand at the beginning of their earthly lives, but already, today, they will be cleansed, refreshed and renewed by the grace of God in baptism, and assured of the hope that he will be with them throughout their lives and for all eternity.

Following the baptisms, we shall hear the prayer which contains the wonderful words:

“May God ... pour upon you the riches of his grace, that within the company of Christ’s pilgrim people, you may daily be renewed by his anointing Spirit.”

I have had the huge privilege of encountering each of our baptism families at different stages of their journey in faith, having married Otto’s parents and baptized his older sisters, led the Memorial Service for Jamie’s grandmother, whom we also remember today, and prepared his mother for Confirmation, and seeing Blythe’s parents and sister, Sunday by Sunday, as part of our regular congregation and children’s groups.

We do indeed all travel during our Christian lives within the company of Christ’s pilgrim people; those gathered here today, and those whom we may never meet.

As we pray for Blythe, Otto and Jamie, we could also pray for one another that we may all fulfil the baptismal exhortation, “Shine as a light in the world, to the glory of God the Father!”