

Little things mean a lot. Gestures of affection, courtesy or respect aren't always grand things. Words like 'please' and 'thank-you'. Holding the door open for one more person. Giving up your seat in a crowded waiting room. Letting someone else go ahead of you at the checkout. Little things - whether or not you are acknowledged for them - (little things) have an impact on the world around us.

People notice. They might offer an awkward smile, or return kindness with kindness. What I know from experience is the feeling of gentle joy that comes from being on the receiving end of a 'random act of kindness' stays with you -for hours (sometimes for days). Little things like this can change your day - they are attitude adjusters of the best kind. And when we hear Jesus parables about seeds - especially the 'smallest of seeds' - we cannot be blamed for thinking about such small, personal acts of grace. This is a problem, because we know too well that the profusion of 'small things' in our lives come in two kinds; the good, which we treasure, and the bad, which we cling to for all the wrong reasons.

Just as the smallest act of kindness can grow and multiply because of the joy it brings us, so too can those tiny, niggling problems develop over time into a full blown tantrum. Little things mean a lot, and often our biggest problems can be traced to the smallest sources. We can't help ourselves; making mountains from mole-hills is a human specialty.

Jesus was not trying to warn us of the negative side of this equation, because this is not a parable of human behaviour - as much as we wish it were. "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground..." Have no fear, this is not about us (though it has everything to do with us). These are kingdom lessons.

It would be too easy to offer examples from the personal, human reading of these parables - how often (and easy) the little things grow into some malignant, destructive force. But Jesus parables always mean to take us from the simply human perspective to the gloriously divine reality - here, offering something as simple as seeds and encouraging us to make deeper connections about the God-blessed world we inhabit. And it begins with an idea: The kingdom of God is like this.

Into our lives lived in the glare of 'either-or', Jesus offers another possibility. These small things are suddenly images of hope in a world where hope is hard to find. Jesus calls our attention to the miracle of growth that happens all around us; a miracle because, without time-lapse photography, we can only see that where once there was seed in soil, now there is a green shoot (the seed would sprout and grow, and [we do] not know how). Even bowing to our current state of knowledge - descriptions of germination, pollination, photosynthesis and so on - in spite of that, we must admit the miracle that is this transformation.

Seed is scattered, and these insignificant bits of stuff do nothing useful until they come into contact with the elements of creation. The dark earth; the bright sun; warm rain and pleasant breezes. By some mystery, these seeds are transformed; grain and fruit - grass and tree. They have become something new and wonderful - something quite unlike their source material. It is a miracle, like it or not - and we are right to be amazed. The kingdom of God is like this.

From such present and (dare I say) ordinary material - through a process that we can describe, but not really understand - we are shown the reality of not just the presence of God, but the presence of the world as God imagines it to be. In this world (coexistent with the world as God imagines it), joy shines in the midst of sorrow, and sorrow moves us to acts of compassionate justice. Hope hangs on the edge of disaster, and disaster moves us to acts of magnificent mercy. It is these tiny fragments of real presence - the

seeds of God's kingdom - that grow and generate such visceral reactions from those who have eyes to see, and ears to hear.

In light of Jesus' parables, it becomes possible (perhaps necessary) to turn the ceaseless cycle of troubling news upside down. While there is nothing 'small' about the manner in which governments affect the lives of citizens - perhaps the madness of our world leaders with regard to nuclear regulation, immigration and global trade are NOT the talking points. The talking points - according to Jesus - are the profusion of voices speaking up and speaking out against the horror of children stolen from parents; against the shameless pandering to ego that disguises itself as diplomacy; against the posing that passes for politics; against the greed that robs Creation of its life-giving beauty. The seed being scattered these days is justice, mercy, peace and hope. Scattered by those who know better, and by those who hope for better. Scattered by faithful and faithless alike, who stand united in their grief for a world gone mad; who hope as one that it is not too late to turn from that madness.

The kingdom of God is like this: all around us, though we have neither the eyes to see nor the inclination to let God be God among us. The evidence is there - the seeds are being scattered and they will sprout and grow; God alone knows how or when - and we must not let the weight of worldly evidence keep us from being amazed by the miracle that is waiting to be seen.

Little things mean a lot, and the smallest of these right now are the signs of God's graceful kingdom, scattered in hope - in frustration - in despair - in love. We can't know how (or when) these seeds will grow, but grow they will - they must! Because the kingdom of God that we sing about - that we pray for - that we long for - arrived with a whisper, early in the morning, on the first day of the week. It came in Jesus' victory over death. It comes with life eternal and abundant. It will come with release for the captive

children, and health for the sick in mind and body. No small things, these, but miraculous nonetheless.