**The Rt Revd Paul Ferguson, Bishop of Whitby, reflects on Mark 4.26‐34 for the Third Sunday after Trinity, 16th June.**

There’s this man called Jesus, he talks about God and all sorts of things, the way he does it is really exciting. Everyone’s going to listen to him. Are you coming as well? All right, I’ll come. So here we are by the lake, there’s so many of us that Jesus has got into a boat as a kind of platform so we can see and hear him. And he’s saying ‘The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he doesn’t know how. Now he’s asking: With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.’

Well, back to Yorkshire in 2024. I love to imagine that I’m there in the crowd with Jesus, among people who were hearing his message fresh and new. This part of the gospel story, with Jesus talking about the seed that grows secretly, and the mustard seed, is the reading that millions of Christians will be hearing in church this Sunday.

Jesus is using these images to help people understand this thing he calls the kingdom of God. What he doesn’t do is to give anything like a dictionary definition, or one of those Wiki articles you can get online now. What he does is to give clues about the character of this kingdom of God: how it is when God’s will is done, when people are caught up in a relationship with him, how it is when what is true to God’s ultimate and eternal purposes touches the here and now, the ordinary and everyday. And I believe that when Jesus talks about seeds and growth he’s inviting people to use their imagination: you can’t tie the kingdom down to flat definitions, and apart from everything else, there’s a ‘wow’ factor: whatever your own picture of the kingdom might be, well, it’s bigger and better than that. The kingdom of God is exciting, and if we have eyes to see, we’ll notice its signs, and we’ll want to be part of it. It’s like a seed growing secretly because it’s God who gives it power to increase. It’s like a mustard seed maybe because even when there’s something very small it’s the real thing and it’s got potential to be huge and wonderful.

We’re invited to be citizens of this kingdom of God. Please let’s never underestimate how important even the smallest, most hidden thing is, that says ‘yes’ to the kingdom: when anyone prays, when there’s an act of loving service, when faith is shared or grasped, when God is praised, when people who are downtrodden receive honour and justice, when we treat the planet and our little bit of it carefully, when the light of Christ shines through a human life. And please, let’s never lose the ‘wow’ factor, the wonder, the delight, as if we really had been in that crowd by the lake.

God our loving Father, may your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.