

Sunday 13th June 2021

Sunday Worship

Bible Reading Mark 4.30-32

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

³⁰ Jesus said, "How can I describe the Kingdom of God? What story should I use to illustrate it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed planted in the ground. It is the smallest of all seeds, ³² but it becomes the largest of all garden plants; it grows long branches, and birds can make nests in its shade."

This has always seemed a bit of a strange parable to me. I'm sure that the mustard plant has small seeds, but does it really become the largest of all garden plants – let alone the largest of all plants, which is what many translations say.

A quick search on Google revealed some interesting theories and explanations. Apparently, the type of mustard plant Jesus would have been referring to can grow to a reasonable height of around 3 metres (10 feet). One quite interesting observation was that maybe Jesus chose to mention this plant because of its habit of quickly reseeding and multiplying in number. Maybe it was a hint to the way the Christian message and Christian churches would spread in future years.

Prayers

In our prayers in church this morning, I will mention some general topics for prayer and after each one, will leave a suitable pause for you to pray silently. Perhaps you would like to do the same at home. Let us pray:-

Firstly, we remember all the disasters, problems, failings, hurt and despair in the world. In particular, we pray for....

We pray for your church throughout the world. We pray that it may...

We pray for our church here in St Ives. We pray for Catherine our minister and David our Church Secretary. We pray for all who work and volunteer in our church. We pray that you will lead and guide us all. In particular we pray for...

We pray for all who are unwell or facing difficulties. In particular we ask for your loving and healing presence to be with...

We pray for ourselves. We thank you for your unfailing love for us. We pray that you will...

We pray together

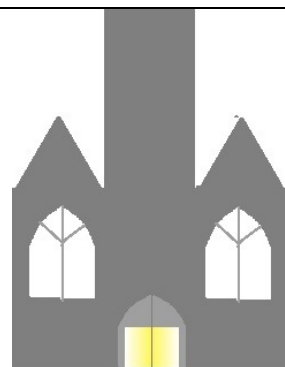
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

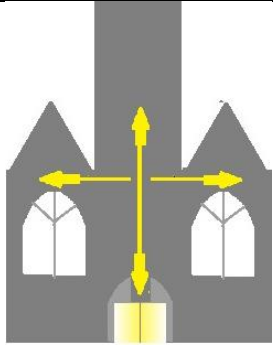
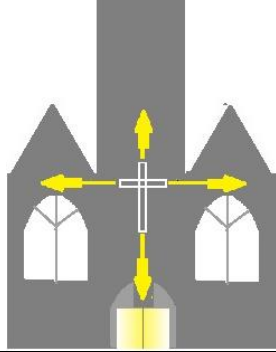
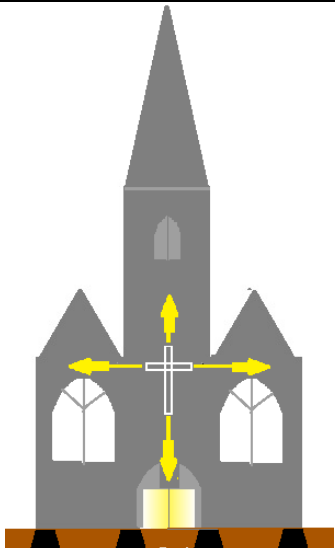
Thinking About Church

Our Church Elders have been thinking about the future of our church. As we think to the future, we can see many challenges but hopefully also some opportunities. It got me thinking about what a church is and below I have tried to think of some of the essentials.

A church definitely needs doors. How would anybody ever come into a church if it didn't have doors.

A church also needs windows to let in the light; how would people be able to see where to go without light?



	<p>A Church needs to have space.</p> <p>It needs to be broad enough to accommodate all the wide variety people who may want to join.</p> <p>It needs to have plenty of headroom – plenty of space for those in the church to be able to express themselves.</p>
<p>A church needs to be somewhere that people can hear about the love of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.</p> <p>It needs to be somewhere that their faith can develop, where all can grow and learn and share.</p>	
	<p>How about a spire?</p> <p>A spire is there to help make a church stand out, to make it easy to find. It also reminds us to look heavenward for our help and inspiration.</p> <p>....and then of course there are the foundations. A church needs good firm foundations to stand firm and to weather the storms.</p>

You are quite possibly thinking to yourselves that I've got this all wrong...and you are probably right. A church is not a building – it is, of course, people who make a church. We are the St Ives Free Church – not the building!

When I thought about it a bit more it seemed to me that the features necessary in a church building would also be similar good features in us. Could we, possibly, be the doors through which people come into our church? Could we try to be the windows letting God's light into our church and into the lives of those who might join us.

Can we find the space in our busy lives to help others in their faith? Are we prepared to be generous in the space which we give to those who may like to join but who

have different ideas, needs and expectations to our own? Do we have the capacity to help others learn and grow in their faith as we continue to learn and grow in ours?

Are we willing to look heavenward to try and discern what God would want us to do and to say? Will we spend time making sure our own foundations are firm and strong?

As I have thought about these things, it has made me more aware of how limited my own commitment to our church is...and has made me more appreciative of those others in our church who recently, and in previous years, have done so much to nurture the life of our church.

For many churches, the future is uncertain. For our church, I hope that we may find a path to a thriving successful future. More than just hoping, I have made myself a promise to regularly pray for the future of our church. If you don't already do so, then perhaps you'd like to also make that promise. I am reminded of that John Wesley quote – 'God does nothing but by prayer, and everything with it'. Lord, help us to pray!

How did it all begin?

On the Lent course, Catherine asked us to think back to where our faith journey started. How and why did we first decide that we believed the Christian gospel and wanted to start on our relationship with God. I recently enjoyed reading the experience of the author/broadcaster Micha Jazz and I thought I'd share with you what Micha wrote.

"From an unchurched, cynical and critical background. I perceived Christianity as a refuge for the weak and vulnerable. But God intervened.

At university I one day found myself in church responding to an invitation to receive Christ. I was certainly interested in all I'd heard, but not entirely convinced.

However, I liked the down-to-earth preacher, Cuthbert Bardsley, then Bishop of Coventry. Chatting after the service, something rang true as he handed us all a Gospel. 'Tomorrow morning you'll wake up and your first thought will be "Oh, no! What an idiot I've been."' However, if you get out of bed, sit down, open this book anywhere and start reading, God will confirm you've made the best decision of your life'.

Monday dawned, I awoke and thought, 'Crikey, I'm an idiot. I've been duped by those Christians'. Having liked Cuthbert, I reluctantly followed his advice and, on that brisk October morning as I read this gospel, I knew that I had found God and God had found me. It was an experience I have never been able to deny or renounce, even when life's circumstances have driven me to that point in pain filled with desperation."

I found it quite moving to read Micha's account. I was particularly taken by the reminder that, for each of us, this decision is the best decision of our lives!

A Closing Prayer

Lord God,
we rejoice in your greatness and power,
your gentleness and love,
your mercy and justice.
Enable us by your spirit
to honour you in our thoughts
and words and actions,
and to walk with you in every aspect of our lives;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen