

Reflection on Mark 4:26-34 **- 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B**

Jesus poses an important statement and a question to his followers in today's Gospel (and to each of us) regarding the *Kingdom of God*: Firstly, Jesus tells us: *This is what the kingdom of God is like....* Then he explores further by asking the question: *What can we say the kingdom of God is like?*

Many spiritual writers today draw our attention to the evolutionary process. The universe is expanding according to informed science. Our human story in the process of evolution brings a consciousness not known before – for the first time through human consciousness we have become conscious of the cosmos or conscious of ourselves. Through that journey we are coming to know ourselves and the whole cosmos as intimately connected. It is a journey of expansion, growth and the awakening to Love already present.

Jesus' own exploration of the *kingdom* is all about growth. What he says about this growth is that it happens in ways that *we do not know*. In other words we do not instigate this *growth* it is done unto us but at the same time we must cooperate with it – we must cooperate with Grace. As a result of this growth the *crop is ready to reap because the harvest has come*. He then goes on to say that the *mustard seed being the smallest seed grows and becomes the biggest shrub providing shade and shelter....* We are that *mustard seed* for our Earth.

How then do we as an Earth community *grow*? How do we as something so *small* provide *shade and shelter* for the earth/cosmos that we are so intimately connected to? Elizabeth Johnson in her book *Quest for the Living God* says: *Clearly, this theology of the Creator Spirit who creates, indwells, compassionately loves, and empowers the world on its great adventure has implications for all of theology. It especially undergirds an ethic of responsible, assertive care for the Earth. A moral universe limited to human persons, is no longer adequate. If the Earth is indeed a sacrament of divine presence, a locus of divine compassion, and a bearer of divine promise, then its ongoing destruction through ecocide, biocide, geocide is a deeply sinful desecration. In the tradition of biblical prophecy and the spirit of Jesus, the response of people of faith needs to become prophetic and challenging, promoting, care, protection, and healing of the natural world even if these go counter to powerful economic and political interests – and they do.* Page 197

Denis Edwards in his book: *Partaking of God* says: *The Spirit draws the whole human community to justice, peace, love, and care for God's creation. But the Spirit is present in the world as defenceless love, a love that is not overpowering but depends on human participation. The Holy Spirit is defenceless in the face of human rejection – but not defeated – and continues to call each person to participate in the common good of the community of life on Earth.* Page 106

So where do we stand both personally and communally in the midst of all this? It seems we largely don't understand the power of Love that resides within us and breathes life into the heart of everything. That *seed of Love* present in every human heart needs our *participation* and cooperation in order to grow. The divisions we see all around us that are within our political systems, our churches, our social and cultural structures, our abuses of human rights and of the Earth and the divisions within our own relationships alert us to our *rejection of the Spirit*. But we cannot keep casting blame onto others while refusing to

look into our own hearts. We can blame governments and church leaders etc for some of the mess we seem to find ourselves in while sitting back blindly promoting the same divisions on a smaller scale alive and active within our own hearts.

These cycles of division within us all must be broken if we are to truly *participate* in the growing of the *Kingdom*. To Love those who hate and persecute us or those around us or our Earth, is perhaps one of the most difficult things we are asked to do as followers of Jesus. To open into forgiveness and compassion is the invitation at the heart of us and sometimes this feels utterly impossible. But if we genuinely **desire** this freedom to grow Love, to be compassionate and to forgive, it will be given to us even though we *do not know how*. When we feel bound or so deeply caught in the divisions within us, if we express our deep desire to be free from this prison then the door of freedom will be opened for us in ways we never expected and that will certainly surprise us. Our individual and collective **desire** is what is critically important here. We need to check our own hearts to discover if we truly **desire** this freedom to grow Love or if we are obstinately hanging onto all that divides our Hearts. Often we can possessively hang onto our anger, hurts and sufferings with no desire to be free of their tyranny or grow beyond them. This is our *rejection* of the Kingdom – of Love itself.

There is nothing more powerful in our world than to see Love, compassion and forgiveness break through these dark cycles of division that destroy everything in their path. Denis Edwards goes on to say: *The Wisdom of God is immediately present to every creature as the very source of its existence*. It is our human responsibility and deep longing to *participate* in this *Wisdom*, but it must begin from within ourselves before it can authentically permeate our world. It is only this *growing seed* of Love that can provide the much needed *shelter* that we and our world and everything in it is hungering for.

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