

## MWA Devotional Paper – October 2025

### *Jesus the Storyteller*

#### ***The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-32 GNB)***

“What shall we say the Kingdom of God is like?” asked Jesus. “What parable shall we use to explain it? It is like this. A man takes a mustard seed, the smallest seed in the world, and plants it in the ground. After a while it grows up and becomes the biggest of all plants. It puts out such large branches that the birds come and make their nests in its shade.”

This parable is also found in Matthew and Luke’s Gospels. It is one of the many parables of Jesus which focus on the natural world. This isn’t really a surprise when you think of the people Jesus was speaking to. Of course, that doesn’t really help us, given that we don’t live in first century Palestine! It is also described by Biblical commentators as a ‘Kingdom’ parable. ‘Kingdom’ being a metaphor to describe God’s influence in the world now and how the world might look if God was the one in charge now. It also looks towards how things will be when God is in charge.

Perhaps we can imagine ourselves listening to Jesus as he teaches. Jesus is in a boat on Lake Galilee; the crowds are on the shore. He has already told several nature-related parables and then he begins this one. You can imagine him asking the first question and then pausing for dramatic effect, gazing over the crowd, before he tells this brief tale of a small seed. If you remember in the first paper on this theme, I explained that parables often have three characters – this story is no exception – the seed, the plant and the birds are the characters. The original listeners would have understood that the mustard seed is proverbial for something very small. In other places it is compared to faith (Matt 17:20), in this story it grows into a flourishing tree which can provide shelter for birds.

Birds also appear in other places in Jesus’ teachings – in Matthew 6:26 he reminds his listeners not to worry - God looks after the birds and he will look after them. The birds in that small story are a reminder of our (and their) dependence on God. The picture painted in the Mustard Seed parable is one of creation being both hospitable – giving birds shelter; and interdependent – the seed is dependent on sun and rain to grow; the bird needs the tree.

I think there is significance in the fact that the characters in the Mustard Seed parable are not human. The late Pope Francis certainly thought so. In 2015 he wrote a long letter called ‘On Care for Our Common Home.’ Francis felt the parable indicated Jesus’ invitation to his followers to really

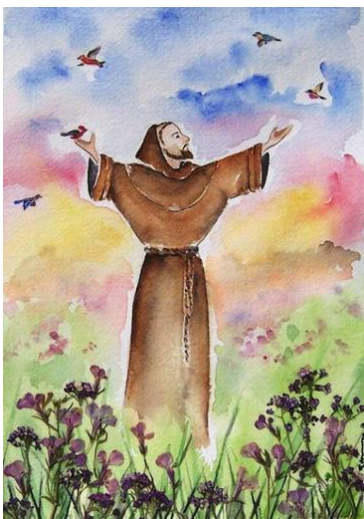
attend to the beauty of the world, and in reflecting on nature to understand God's activity in the world and to understand our place in the world. The Kingdom of God is like this – **all creation**, human and non-human are interconnected. I mentioned above that the parable depicts creation as being hospitable - the tree gave shelter to the birds. Perhaps the shelter for some birds was temporary, shade from the hot sun of Palestine. But nests are also mentioned, a safe place for creation to continue.

We are part of creation and the Kingdom of God and we have a God-given responsibility to care for creation. All creation.

I think there can be no doubt that human-caused climate change is devastating our home – planet earth. Heavy rains, heat waves and droughts are affecting food production causing shortages and price rises. In 2021, rising food prices pushed an additional 30 million people in low-income countries towards food insecurity. The people most at risk from climate change-related crop failure and hunger are in countries where poor farmers are disproportionately vulnerable. In our own country, more than one in six species of plant and animal life are at risk of extinction.

Perhaps one meaning of the parable of the Mustard Seed is for us to live out the Kingdom of God on earth in humility, recognising our interdependence with all creation, listening to the voices of creation and choosing to live our lives accordingly.

## Discussion



1. St Francis of Assisi, well-known as a lover of all creation wrote 'Canticle of the Creatures' – which forms the basis for the hymn – 'All Creatures of our God and King.'

Have a look at the hymn and think about how Francis saw creation.

2. Do you think looking after creation is about justice, and if so, justice for who?

3. What can we do as individuals, as a Circle and congregation to look after the planet?