

**1. 'It's too good to be true!' we sometimes say.**

Perhaps we are in a shop, and we see something we have been looking for, for a while, at a price well below that which we were expecting to pay. Or more significantly, we learn that a friend who lives a long way off – who we haven't seen for years – has made plans to come and visit us. Or we read a book or watch a film which has a beautiful ending and when it ends, we are glowing, but then sighingly say, 'but it's too good to be true!'

**2. I have sometimes experienced this 'too good to be true' reaction, or noticed it in others, on moving to a new place.**

I remember when I moved out to New Zealand in my 30s. I knew the country quite well – given I had visited it a couple of times for extended periods, and heard about since being a small boy from my mother. And when I was settling in to my new work and life in Auckland, I would often meet newly arrived immigrants – British and others – who had chosen to move to New Zealand and who were walking around in a state of bliss. Loving the outdoor life, or loving the natural beauty, or loving the relaxed culture. It was a joyful thing to be part of! But after a time, it sometimes seemed to 'wear off.'

I sometime walk along the waterfront here in Menton and feel a bit the same; hearing the sea lapping the beach, seeing the mountains, seeing the old town's buildings. Too good to be true? No! But there are other realities in life which mean the reaction can wear off too easily!! I am learning to try and practice a continual sense of thankfulness and gratitude amongst all this...

Our readings today all challenge us with the idea of God's growing kingdom and we can ask, 'is it all too good to be true?'

**3. We simply have a natural reaction to think the idea of the Kingdom of God – of goodness, of peace, of restored relationships – is not trustworthy and just too good to be true!**

Paul challenges that reaction in his letter to the Corinthians we heard today. He says, yes, our bodies might be ailing, and we might be tempted to look at people and the world 'from a human point of view.' But two things, he says, must challenge us. First, we must learn to walk by faith (trust) rather than by sight. Because, second, a new creation has been heralded by Christ's resurrection. Our English translations dampen this down.

In verse 17, we read, ***'So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!'*** In fact, the Greek reads, 'If anyone in Christ: new creation!' It's an ecstatic shout of praise!

And in our gospel passage, we read, 'Jesus also said, ***'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 does not know how.'*** He is challenging the disciples natural inclination that finds it hard to believe the Kingdom of God has come, by saying yes, you don't understand! But it's true!

**4. Why don't you or I trust that the Kingdom of God is here and growing? For me, there are various reasons. One is my mental health.**

I am increasingly aware that my internal mood shapes my external perception and reaction to life. Some days, I might wake and feel positive and well: and on those days, it is easy to see hope and possibilities all around me. But some days, I might wake and feel low, anxious or generally just 'dulled.' On those days, the signs of hope are harder to see, they seem less real. The reality 'out there' hasn't changed. The thing that has changed is my internal mood. The advice all the

wisdom gives is: learn to recognise your internal moods and feelings, so that you can be wiser in your discernment of the truth 'out there.' And then, too, choose more proactively how you will orientate your life, now that you are more self-aware.

We can make choices each day as to what we will listen to, what we will read, how we will act and speak – and each of these then has an impact on my ability to trust the Kingdom of God is growing. Events inevitably will happen in your life and around you which cause you to question the Kingdom of God. Watching the world news will make most of us ask, 'how on earth are we ever going to have hope!?' That is because most news in the media, to be reportable, tends to be bad news. We know that! So this challenges me to think hard about what news I read and watch and to strike a healthy balance between being informed about the reality of the problems and challenges in the world as well as the good things that happen, day in, day out.

Maybe some of you know the Positive News website, which scours world events and looks out to report the 'good news' stories which too often are overlooked. If not, check it out! We don't want to become followers of 'fake news.' But we do want to be people who develop a healthy and balanced understanding of what is going on around us.

**5. Jesus is aware that too often our understanding and awareness falls short. So he taught in parables to express difficult concepts which we have a hard time accepting. 'With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.' (v.33, 34)**

And in these parables today we are left with two truths which further challenge our reaction, 'It's too good to be true!' The first is that the growth, as well as us not understanding it, happens in the dark: at night and in the soil of the earth. The seed is scattered and it grows, night and day. And the tiny mustard seed germinates in the darkness of the soil, and before you know it, it is a big tree.

That tells me it's not about me, it continues without (even despite!) my efforts. It happens in the 'stuff of life' – the dirt of the ground, the very dirt from which we are made. That's a comfort and a warning. A comfort because it tells you to agonise less, stress less – God will carry the world and you. A challenge because it tells you no matter how much you fight against it, don't like the idea, get used to it: the Kingdom of God is growing!

**6. The second truth is that the grand, magnificent tree that the Kingdom of God is growing into, will be a tree, 'where the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.'**

When Jesus used the language of trees, his listeners would have found resonances from the Old Testament scriptures with that image. One such place is the prophet Ezekiel, speaking to the exiled Jewish people who find themselves in woe and desolation in Babylon.

In our OT reading today, we heard the prophet's words of hope that out of all their desolation, '***I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar; I will set it out..... I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain.....in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar. Under it every kind of bird will live; in the shade of its branches will nest winged creatures of every kind.***' I don't want to explain that image too much! It is beautiful. Close your eyes and imagine that image! Let that image inspire you!

**7. Jesus says: the Kingdom of God is coming, is here, is growing, is unstoppable!**

Too good to be true? Depends what you trust. Depends how you orientate your life. Depends on your ability to imagine. But thank God, at the end of the day, it doesn't depend on me or you!