**Reading** Mark 4:26-32

Jesus said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, 27and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. 28The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. 29But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.’

30 He also said, ‘With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? 31It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 32yet 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.’

**Sermon**

As a Rural priest it’s always such a delight to write something on rogation because it’s a gig that I know well. When you live in the countryside you are much more aware of nature, the changing of the seasons, the natural movement of farming and agriculture, actually as I write this, I can hear the lambs bleating the other side of the hedge and the occasional flapping wings of a low-flying bird overhead, just wonderful. But if we’re not careful we can take all of this for granted and that’s where rogation comes in.

Rogation has been part of the church’s calendar from about 470 A.D. and the word rogation comes from the Latin word ‘Rogare’ which means to ask. So, in times gone by farmers would ask their local priest to come and bless their crops and livestock and this would often involve a great procession of the choir, the churchwardens and other dignitaries as well as the priest, so they would all process around the boundary of their parish praying for its protection in the coming year. This act is more traditionally known in our rural context as the beating of the bounds! Now I have done a few of these processions in my time and I’ll be honest with you, it can be very enjoyable but when you get to be the Rector of 7 or 8 parishes, it becomes a bit too much, I’m really not that fit!

If we return to ecclesiastical or church history for a moment original rogation themes of blessing the fields and beating the bounds were commended in the 1630s by the poet George Herbert, that epitome of English Country Parsons. He said that processions should be encouraged for four reasons: 1) A blessing of God for the fruits of the field, 2) Justice in the preservation of bounds, 3) Reconciling of differences with your neighbours. 4) Mercy, in relieving the poor by a liberal distribution of bounty.

Although ancient I think these are four pretty good themes, that still need to be prayed for and acted upon. And if you think carefully you can see that the church is still very much fulfilling this role. Although boundaries have changed we still make time to care and pray for our farming communities each year that the land will be fruitful, and that their work will be fair. And the call to reconcile with one’s neighbours is a profound Christian message and finally the church is playing a massive role across the nation in distributing food and other goods to those in need, particularly at the moment.

The other thing to say about rogation is that it always takes place in the springtime, when there is a renewing of the earth, it follows Easter too, so we are still in the season of resurrection. So, this sense of renewal and resurrection combine well together to sharpen our focus on new life and new starts.

In the gospel reading today there is much talk of seeds and growth, seeds of course are the point where it all begins; the trees, flowers and crops all around us and even ourselves, all began as seeds, it’s always such a wonder to think that so much life is contained in such a tiny thing. As a child as an adult too I still love growing sunflowers just to see how tall I can get them, there is something quite amazing about watching a sapling push its way out of a seed pod and it is in those magic moments that you realise that there is something far more important going on in the universe then we could ever imagine.

And guess what? We are part of that, and this profound interconnectedness between humanity and the whole created order reminds us that thankfully we too are under the care of God Almighty, the one who truly knows the story of how we grow from seed, to sapling and into what we are fully called to be.

And just like any crop we can take a long time to ripen and flourish, and for some people that means being re-planted again and again! And if that’s you remember there’s a great saying that goes “sometimes when you think you are being buried; you are actually being planted.”

And so, as we return to our theme of rogation, still mindful of our local farming communities and now of course a new emphasis on global ecology let us be grateful that there is still some order in what seems to be a very muddled world at times, that the changing seasons still bring us new life, that each new day still brings us eternal hope, so let us celebrate that in God all things are made new. Amen