

Religion

Start the mustard seed growing day by day

This article is derived from the sermon for Canada Day, given at the Anglican churches of St. Stephen's Hornby and St. John's, Stewarttown, by Trev Jones, a visiting seminarian. The readings referred to, are Psalm 85:7-13. Isa. 32:1-5, 16-18, John 15:12-17 and Col. 3:12-17.

PART II

If you think about it, being Christian, following Christ, means doing what he asks us to do - being fruitful. If we are not being fruitful, then we are not doing what he asks us to do, are therefore not following him, and cannot therefore call ourselves Christians.

The disciples no doubt thought Jesus had given them a big job, and in the context of this world's problems today, it seems like a big job for us too, but all big movements start small.

Jesus likened the Kingdom of Heaven to a mustard seed that although so tiny would grow to be massive. The seed was so tiny that a sparrow could swallow it without needing a drink of water, but if left in the ground that seed would grow into a great tree and give shelter for many, many sparrows, for many, many years.

Even assured that we have the help of the Father in spreading His message, and the knowledge that even a small effort can grow into something very large, we may still have reservations.

We might say, "I couldn't serve God in spreading the Gospel. I've been - well, I've not been a really good person. I am not really the sort that could help Christ in his mission. I am not good enough to be a disciple."

Paul tells us in his letter to the Colossians, that yes, we do have earthly sinfulness in us, but we can do something about that. He tells us to shake off that old person, that old man or woman, and take on the new man or woman.

"Put on" he says, as in putting on a new garment, "Put on," the new person, and take the qualities of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience.

Put on a new person.

It's not easy to put on that new person.

People don't understand when we make dramatic changes in our lives. They think that something is wrong. They may think we have "got religion." Said that way, it sounds like some sort of disease, doesn't it? It's like saying, "They've got laryngitis."

As part of being a new person, Paul tells us to be forgiving of one another - to forgive others as the Lord has forgiven us, and above all, he says, "Put on love."

Love is the essential element. It is what binds all those other qualities - forbearance, forgiveness, kindness, compassion, meekness - together.

Put on love. Or, as Jesus told us, "Love one another."

How do we do it? How do we build the spiritually strong life that enables us to do that?

Paul advises us to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, to let it teach us and give us wisdom. We can't become loving people by ourselves. We need the word of Christ. We need to study it and reflect on it, dwell on it, and

digest it so that it becomes a part of us.

I think it was Augustine who described the state of being Christian through and through. It is when you don't have to think about the right thing to do. You don't have to debate which way to act in a given situation. You have acquired the habit of knowing and acting Christ-like - automatically.

Let the word of Christ - his Gospel, His teaching, teach us.

"But," you might ask, "Is that going to solve the world's problems?"

Not right away.

The mustard seed has to be planted and nourished if it is to become a tree, and it is the same with the Kingdom of God.

But this is how it starts.

Just imagine, if you and I put off malice, division, hate, anger, impatience, the hunger for useless things, and lived our lives as fruitful Christians, really loving each other, as Jesus asks us to.

Just imagine if we were so good at it that we influenced all those with whom we came into contact, to the degree that they too became brand spanking new fruitful Christians, and lived their lives in real Christ-like love of others, and then they in turn influenced all those they came into contact with.

Just imagine if it spread throughout this land, like a great tide, washing over everyone - a great tide of Christian love.

Imagine if that tide washed over borders, if it went north and south, east and west and it covered the whole world.

Imagine what politics would be like if there were no hatred, if there were no anger, no recrimination, if leaders didn't covet more and more power, but made all their decisions based on the precepts of Jesus Christ.

Imagine what it would be like if nations really did assist other nations, not work to get them into debt, to become pawns. Imagine if for once, politics were dominated by love.

It's impossible to imagine isn't it?

Well, don't worry if you can't

imagine it. Isaiah tells us in the beautiful poetry of today's Old Testament reading what it will be like. And I say "will" because it will happen. Despite what we think now, despite how we may despair of human nature, we are promised by God that it will happen.

And it is up to us. It is up to you and me. We don't have to worry about what anyone else is doing. Never mind what they are doing over there, or over there. We can start that mustard seed growing ourselves.

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