

The birds of the air

Janice Scott *reflects on* Mark 4:26-34

Jesus generally taught using parables. People remember a good story, and many of Jesus' stories made reference to familiar passages from the Old Testament that his listeners would know well. Both of the stories in today's passage from Mark are about God's kingdom, and both contain Old Testament references. In the story about scattering the seed, the sickle is a reference to the book of Joel (3:13) and, in the story about the mustard seed, the reference to "birds of the air" is from Ezekiel (31:6).

Of course this is about far more than simply telling a memorable and entertaining story. Each of Jesus' parables held a challenge, a new twist, if you like, on a familiar tale. These are clever, multi-layered stories that spoke to Jesus' listeners – and still speak to us today – in different ways each time they are heard or read. Perhaps the challenge for us is to understand that the growth of God's kingdom is not under our control. This growth depends on soil and the weather, both of which are under God's control. So no matter what we do, God's kingdom will continue to grow. It may have very small beginnings, but it will grow to such an extent that, like the birds of the air, we and all of God's creation will find shelter there. ☺



God of growth, help me to appreciate that the expansion of your kingdom requires only small beginnings. When I am tempted to believe that success or failure depends on me, remind me that you have control. Amen.

The General Synod

Part 3 – What is it like on General Synod?

by Becky Mynett

General Synod usually meets twice a year for three to five days. Sometimes there is an additional meeting in November. Meetings in February and November are held at Church House (next to Westminster Abbey) and the July meeting is at the University of York.

The programme is always very full. Most days run from 9am to 7pm with some lasting until 10pm. Each session works like Parliament,

so apart from lunch and dinner breaks, there are only short gaps between items – members have to decide what to miss for a much needed break! Mealtimes and breaks are important both for recuperation and also for getting to know other members and discussing issues of concern.

There are also fringe events on some evenings, during the lunch break and even over breakfast. These are organised by the various "special interest" groups, Synod committees, charities and other Church organisations. ☺

Animals in the Bible

The snake

by Caroline Fletcher

There are mixed attitudes towards snakes in biblical writings. Asps and vipers inhabited Israel, so it is unsurprising that snakes were feared because of their bites (Amos 5:18-19). Serpents were often called "fiery", possibly due to the burning sensation their venom caused (Isaiah 14:29).

However, even the snake in the Garden of Eden is not portrayed completely negatively. The Genesis story

reflects a widespread belief that snakes were clever saying "the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal" (3:1). This idea is also behind Jesus' appeal for his disciples to be "wise as serpents" (Matthew 10:16).

Snakes were associated, too, with healing and immortality. In Numbers 21 many Israelites are bitten by snakes and God tells Moses to hold up a bronze snake so anyone looking upon it may be healed. Later, Jesus likens the lifting up of the bronze snake to his crucifixion, which also brought new life (John 3:14-15). ☺

“ I fear God, yet I am not afraid of him.”

Thomas Browne (1605-1682), English polymath and author