

Mr Men and the Kingdom of God: Mark 4.21-34



Sharing the mysteries of our faith with young children is full of joy but does require a fair amount of imagination. My first zoom Sunday School with Harrison aged three felt more like a run-in with reality. Despite his parents' best attempts, Harrison could not settle down and spent most of the session, running around the kitchen with a laundry basket over his head.

Eager to help me out, his parents kindly gave me a hint on how to get Harrison's attention. He loves the Mr Men books, they told me.

So, I got my hands on the whole Mr Men book collection and a new world of theological interpretation opened in front of me.

Mr Strong was of course Jesus. We become Mr Bump in need of Mr Strong to save us.

I used the Mr Men book collection with its 48 titles to explain how the Bible is put together.

We prayed for the Mr Smalls, and the Mr Talls and the Mr Goods in our lives.

That experience more than any other helps me see why so much of Jesus's teachings were through parables. Explaining complex ideas with everyday imagery

and language helps us grasp what we did not before. The parables introduce us to the concept of the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom which is now and not quite yet. And that takes quite a bit of getting your head around.

Yet however beneficial that may be, it is not the whole point of parables ... there is more. Recently, someone asked me to unleash my imagination as a novel approach to responding to a situation we were exploring. I have never been asked that before. I am not quite sure I rose to the occasion, but it did get me thinking ...

Through the parables, Jesus calls us to engage with his teachings by means of our imagination ... not the kind of imagination that sees what is not but imagination that enables us to see what could be.

Through the Parables of the Growing Seed and Mustard Seed, Christ invites us to dream what living the Kingdom of God, now, in the circumstances we find ourselves, could be. In anticipation of the “not quite yet”, I find those dreams inspire us for the now and spurs us into action. So where will your imagination take you?

As I look at the world around me, I see many inside and outside the Church responding to Christ's call with imagination in our local community:
Those involved in a local initiative to make sure that mothers get bunches of flowers on Mothering Sunday.
Someone organising zoom socials for those who may feel isolated.
Others finding ways to get Easter eggs to children from deprived backgrounds.
Someone leading others in prayer at critical times during the day.
Or someone taking a stand about everyday choices which help save the beauty of our planet.

These are but a few examples of a myriad of seemingly small initiatives, driven by passionate dreamers who make things happen. When looked at collectively, however, they are like the mustard seed “that grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs” (Mark 4: 32) ... a piece of heaven on earth, with birds making nests in its shade.



Lent has a very different feel this year. It is far less about self-denial, far less about giving something up and far more about taking on something new. As we journey together towards Easter, that something new for me feels far more about re-imagining what being the people of the Resurrection is all about. And goodness knows then where our imagination will beckon us next.

And, what about Harrison?

Well, Harrison is now four, and a bit like the mustard seed, he has grown in stature and in maturity. These days he is fully engaged with everything we do in Sunday School and has plenty to say. When he prays, we are all intrinsically drawn into his world of prayer. Harrison now has a new toy. A colourful elf, he was given for Christmas.... And since being introduced to Mr Elf, I have been racking my brain to find a way to explore divine mysteries through the eyes of Santa's little helper.

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Help! Answers on a postcard, please.

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Reader on secondment to St Mary's Alderley and St Catherine's Birtles

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