

Growing families

The Bishop of Carlisle's Harvest for the Hungry Appeal 2012

Church Sheet

Sermon suggestions

This year's appeal is supporting two projects, in Cambodia and Uganda, that are helping people to better feed and care for their families through very simple interventions, such as setting up kitchen gardens and producing biogas from pig dung for cooking and lighting. Brief details of both projects can be found in the appeal leaflet.

These notes contain a simple outline to be expanded on in your church's own context and tradition. We hope you will find them helpful.

Matthew 5:13-16 (salt and light)

Matthew 13:31-32 (parable of the mustard seed)

Matthew 13:33 (parable of the leaven)

While some of Jesus' teaching was difficult for people to understand and some is argued over even now, some of it was crystal clear, such as the three short readings here. They all carry the same message – something small can make a huge difference.

Beyond this basic meaning, though, is a message about the unstoppable nature of these things – a room cannot be dark if there is even the slightest chink of light shining in; a plate of food with too much salt cannot be redeemed; mustard trees are tough and self-seeding like weeds so once you have one growing in your field, it would be very hard to get rid of it altogether. And you have to work hard to stop dough rising, as any home baker will testify if they have tried – like the author – to slow it down by putting it in the fridge and then found it overflowing a couple of hours later!

Parallels can be drawn with the unstoppable nature of rumours, whispers among the people about the corruption of a country's rulers or the unethical practices of big businesses. 'The truth will out,' we still say, and despite the attempted silencing of their peoples by oppressive regimes to try to protect their power, and

super-injunctions by the rich in this country to try to protect their privacy from revelations of misdemeanours, those stories spread and grow like the yeast in that dough.

Jesus was speaking about the kingdom of heaven, and Christians have seen over the past two thousand years many examples of our faith enduring and spreading even when those in power have sought to suppress or destroy it. From small beginnings – a handful of poor and largely marginalised people in the Middle East two thousand years ago, Christianity has spread to leave its mark on every corner of the Earth.

The projects our appeal is supporting this year are well-illustrated by these words of Jesus. In Cambodia, for example, a poor family who started from scratch 10 years ago have been steadily building up their resources and improving their livelihoods by growing new things, breeding pigs and fish and setting up a small business. They are now able not only to support themselves but also to contribute financially from their own savings to things that will further improve their lives, such as biogas for heating and cooking in their home and shop. Having enough money to be able to save anything at all would have been something inconceivable to them just a few years ago.

Christian Aid and the Mothers' Union have grown over the years as well, again from very small beginnings. They are now organisations that can have an impact in countries right across the world, and are organisations we can trust with the money we give, that it will be spent wisely and carefully to transform lives like those of the people we have read about in our appeal leaflets. Please give generously to the Bishop's Appeal and pray that the money we give, even if it seems small, will continue to make big changes to the lives of the people that these projects are helping.

You could give out little packets of salt (the sort that come from a café) as a reminder to everyone that we are called to be salt and light. People could be asked to put them somewhere where they will come across them from time to time. (This would also fit with the children's address below.)

Ideas for a children's address – salt and yeast

Although these passages are quite easy, it would be better to start with a question. Ask who likes stories and then talk about how and why Jesus liked to tell stories. Ask for volunteers to help act out the story from one (or all) of these passages and give them props to hold.

Alternatively, have salt, a light, mustard (seeds in a packet or a jar), bread and so on in a bag and ask people to guess the connection.

A simple illustration to reinforce the point about salt, light, mustard seeds or yeast being able to have a big effect could most easily be done with salt. You will need two or more large bowls, one (or more) full of water but with no salt in and one with a teaspoon of salt mixed in. These could either all be placed at the front of the church or scattered around it. Equip the children with spoons or small cups for tasting, and challenge them to identify the salty one. (You could ask them all to keep it secret until you ask them to all point at or run to the salty one at the end, which would make a more dramatic impact.)

Another option would be to invite a member of the church who makes bread at home, to bring in some dough for the children to knead and to talk to them about the way that yeast makes it rise.

Then explain the connection – that Jesus taught us that the effects of what he said would spread a long way and affect a lot of people, like the salt in the water. Jesus said that the way we behave can have a big effect on other people, in the same way. Then explain that the projects that our church and diocese are supporting this year are also doing small things but making a very big difference to people's lives.

