

## The Curate and the Mustard Seed – 13<sup>th</sup> June 2021

It's now 12 years since Nicky Gladstone and others planted the seedling Cedar Tree Community Cafe in Christ Church and since then it has grown and flourished, and all being well it will re-open on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> July. I wonder if one of the reasons it was originally named 'The Cedar Tree Cafe' was because of the passage we heard from Ezekiel.

God plants in Israel 'a cedar under which every kind of bird will live; in the shade of its branches will nest birds of every kind.' When Christ tells the story of the mustard seed, he appears to be quoting from Ezekiel and in both passages the point is that although we can't see the force that drives them, we know by faith that the growth and flourishing of both the seed and the cedar tree 'cutting' are from God.

In just 3 weeks' time we will be welcoming our curate, Kara, who will join us initially as part of the congregation and then as part of the ministry team. Kara will be with us for around three and a half years and she is to be a Pioneering curate. And what is that?

An ordinary curate is a newly fledged priest. They bring to the church all their life experience and in addition they have been moved by the Holy Spirit to offer themselves for training. They have been selected by a rigorous process and trained for the priesthood but the training is largely theoretical. They haven't actually experienced being a priest in a church. So a curate spends around three years experiencing what it is like to serve and lead and minister in a church community. At the end of curacy they usually find a church of their own to lead.

A 'pioneer curate' is a little different. They are selected and trained in a similar way, but the training is for a ministry which will take place at the edges of, or even outside, the church building and church community. The charge of a pioneer minister is not so much to 'bring people into church' as to make or find opportunities for the Holy Spirit to act in the local community and then blow it into flames. Finding those opportunities is the creative bit – it is sometimes said that pioneer ministers are 'dreamers who do.'

I think we should all be clear that Kara is not coming as a spare pair of hands to decrease my workload, nor is she intended to build up the number of people coming to Christ Church. But if all goes well, and I am cautiously optimistic that with your prayers and goodwill it will, Kara might increase the number of people outside Christ Church who have heard rumours of the love of God in Julian Road.

As a church, over the last twelve years or so you have already prepared the soil in which God can work through Kara. The connections between Christ Church and the community are deep. We have connections with the Caribbean community as we will celebrate next week on Windrush Day. We have friends in Julian Road who have come to the Cedar Tree Cafe for years and will return when it finally re-opens on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup>. There are people who only come to Christ Church to hear the choir or for the carol service, but they come.

Those community connections are the beginning, the well-turned soil. Kara will join us on July 4<sup>th</sup>, quietly, as a member of the congregation licensed to lay ministry. We will spend two or three months getting to know each other, as Kara talks and listens, walks the area, and gets used to this new life and work. Then in early October, Kara will be ordained as a deacon by Bishop Ruth in Wells Cathedral and from then on she will begin to help to lead services and gradually develop projects. And all the time the seeds are growing – the seed of the kingdom. Only God knows which of the projects Kara joins or initiates will grow. One

of the 'givens' of pioneer ministry is that if you try new things, some of them will fail. One of our roles is to give Kara space and confidence to risk new things and sometimes to fail.

One of the conclusions of the stories of the seeds growing at night and the mustard seed, is that God gives the growth, and when God does, it is irresistible – the mustard seed grows to the size of a cedar tree. Whatever comes from God is invincible. Our role in the growth of the Kingdom of God is to encourage, to weed out the things that are not of God and to water and enjoy and tend those things which are. The seed is God's, the soil is God's and if God chooses the signs of the kingdom – love, faith, prayer and healing – will grow like the cedar tree in Ezekiel's prophecy, from the size of a mustard seed to the size of a great tree. And all the birds of Julian Road will rest in its branches.