

Thinking Day 2107
Theme: “Let’s Grow”
Readings: Mark 4:3-9
John 3:1-5

Growing?

Something that grows? Tell me!

Flowers; trees; hair; we do, our minds, our friendships

We thought a little about how these things grow.

We grow – I have a small child’s shoes; and a large person’s shoes! Are we born with big feet? No! Our feet grown. I have a small person’s t-shirt, and a large person’s t-shirt – are we born the size of the large person? No! We grow! We start off small and we grow, we get bigger; when we’re old, sometimes we start to get smaller again. We grow in other ways: $1+1=?$; this is the sum we do first at school; $9k + 5 = 14$, what is k ? Then we learn how to do these equations and even more complicated ones, so we grow in what we understand about maths and the world. There are some things about us that are always growing: our hair is always growing and needs cut; our fingernails and toenails are always growing and need cut. So we grow in all of these ways.

Jesus told a story about people growing in faith. It was the story of a farmer sowing seeds and not in nice neat rows, but taking his bag and throwing the seed as he walked up and down the field. The seed went everywhere and in the story it landed in four different places: first, it landed on the path; then it landed amongst the stones at the side of the field; thirdly, it landed among the weeds; finally, some landed in the good soil. The seed on the path didn’t grow because the path was so hard that the seed could do nothing; the seed among the stones started to grow, but the sun was so hot and there was very little root, so it died; the seed among the weeds just got choked out because the weeds were stronger; the seed on the good soil grew and gave a great harvest.

This is a story about us and the way faith grows: sometimes we don’t listen and we will not grow in faith; we listen a little but hard things happen to us and we give up; we listen a little but other things become more important and faith gets squeezed out; we listen and take in what we hear and we grow in faith every day and become the kind of people Jesus wants. It is a good story and it tells us how we can grow in faith and with God.

Growing with God

What have you learned today? What did you learn yesterday? Anything? Or have you stopped learning? Is learning and growing only for people under 25? Have you heard of the U3a – the University of 3rd Age “provides... life-enhancing and life-changing opportunities” for people who are retired or semi-retired, for “older people”. There are 150 groups in Edinburgh, people who want to learn something new and grow in a skill of some kind, whether it be art, cooking, dancing, chess and lots more. Growing is for everybody, no matter your age or stage in life.

We’re not sure how old Nicodemus was; every painting shows him as an older man, but we really have no idea of his age. We do know that he was a respected teacher of the faith in Jerusalem and people looked up to him; maybe some of them thought “Nicodemus knows all the answers to every question!” People listened to him teach and learned lots from him about faith and about the life that God wanted them to live. Then Nicodemus heard about Jesus and really wanted to meet Jesus; he had heard so much about him, and was fascinated by what he heard and wanted to meet this Jesus for himself. He went to visit Jesus, but he went at

night so that nobody would see him; he was a bit scared that other people might misunderstand!

Nicodemus had seen some of the miracles that Jesus had done and had heard about others; so he knew in his heart that God had sent Jesus into the world, but he still wasn't altogether sure. He said to Jesus: *"you can't do these things if God isn't with you!"* Straight away Jesus said to him: *"No-one can see God's kingdom unless he is born from above!"* Pardon! "I don't understand; are you suggesting that I need to become like a little baby again and be born like that all over again; that's impossible!" Here was something Nicodemus didn't understand! Jesus started to teach him about faith and what faith means and how someone becomes a new person when they believe in Jesus. Here was something new, something Nicodemus had never heard before. But Nicodemus learned; he accepted this something new and we know from the rest of the story that Nicodemus became a friend of Jesus for the rest of his life.

Faith is something that grows. We listen to Jesus and learn new things; we read the Bible and discover exciting things we've never seen before, about God or about ourselves or about the world. It is not always easy, not always smooth – sometimes faith grows well and quickly and strong, other times it's a struggle and hard and there are questions and doubts in our minds. There are questions that we can't answer, and we need help to find the answers; there are questions that stay in our minds for a long time. But faith is such a good thing because it connects us with the love, grace and power of God. Don't ever stop looking and learning about important things, about values in life, about things that matter; don't let values and important things like faith get squeezed out of your life; but make room for values like faith because values shape the way we see the world, the way we see ourselves, the way we see other people. I think the best set of values are to be found with Jesus; we are never too old to learn something new. Nicodemus was an important man, but also a humble man: he was willing to listen and to learn; his discovered something new on that night when he went to visit Jesus; what he learned shaped the way he lived the rest of his life. Is there something for us to learn today?