

Sermon preached at OCC on 22 February 2026

Matthew 4:1-11 and Matthew 13:31-32

The Kingdom Sower

Today is the first Sunday of Lent, and it is also the day of Anastasia's baptism. At first glance these two moments seem very different. Lent begins in the wilderness, with Jesus fasting for forty days and facing temptation. Baptism, on the other hand, is a joyful moment when we welcome a child into the family of God. Yet both speak about the same thing: the Kingdom of God.

In the Gospel reading from Matthew 4, Jesus stands at the beginning of his ministry. After his baptism, he is led by the Spirit into the wilderness. There he fasts, and there he faces temptation. The devil shows him the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. They are impressive, powerful, and immediate. They represent the kind of kingdom people usually expect — visible strength, control, and success.

But Jesus refuses them. This moment is not just about personal temptation. It reveals the kind of kingdom Jesus will bring. He will not establish God's reign through power, spectacle, or domination. He chooses a different way — the way of obedience, trust, and faithfulness to God.

In many ways, this wilderness moment prepares Jesus for his mission. It reminds us of Israel's forty years in the wilderness, learning to depend on God. Where Israel struggled, Jesus remains faithful. From this point onward, he begins proclaiming and embodying the Kingdom of Heaven.

Later in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus explains what this kingdom is like. And surprisingly, he compares it to a mustard seed. "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it becomes the greatest of shrubs."

This is quite unexpected. People often imagine God's kingdom arriving with unmistakable power. But Jesus says it begins small — almost unnoticed. Like a tiny seed in the soil.

In fact, mustard plants were not always welcomed by farmers. They could spread quickly and take over a field. Yet Jesus chooses this image to describe the kingdom of God. Something small, easily overlooked, yet alive with the power to grow far beyond what anyone expects.

This tells us something important. When Jesus began his ministry, it did not look like the arrival of a great kingdom. There were no armies, no palaces, no political power. There was simply Jesus, a few disciples, and a message about God's reign.

And yet that small beginning changed the world. The kingdom Jesus planted was not built by the sword. History has shown that kingdoms built by force eventually collapse by force. But the kingdom of God grows in a different way — quietly, steadily, through transformed lives and faithful people.

This brings us to today. In a few moments, Anastasia will be baptised. It may seem like a small event: water, words, prayers, and a gathered community. In the eyes of the world, it may not look very significant.

But the Gospel reminds us that this is exactly how the Kingdom of God works. God often begins with what seems small. Today Anastasia is welcomed into God's family and into God's kingdom. We do not yet know how God will shape her life, how faith will grow in her, or how she may one day share God's love with others. But like a mustard seed planted in the soil, something real begins today. And this is true not only for Anastasia, but for all of us.

Lent invites us to remember how Jesus chose God's way in the wilderness. Baptism reminds us that we are part of the kingdom he came to bring. Each of us is called, in our own way, to be sowers of that kingdom — through acts of love, faithfulness, mercy, and hope.

Small things in God's hands can grow into something far greater than we imagine. So today we give thanks for Anastasia, and we pray that God will nurture the seed of faith in her life. And may God help all of us to live as people of this growing kingdom.

Amen.