



Sermon preached by Tara Qu on 16th June 2024

Readings: *Ezekiel 17.22-24; Mark 4.26-34*

Trinity III

### The Sharing Together Time

Does anyone know what a Möbius Strip is? A Möbius Strip is a surface that can be formed by attaching the ends of a strip of paper together with a half-twist. What is magical about a Möbius Strip is that the two surfaces of the strip became one surface.



We have read two different stories. One is from the Old Testament and the other one is from the New Testament. The one in the Old Testament talks about God will take a sprig/twig from a cedar, and he will make it grow on a high mountain. It will grow so big that many birds will live under it. This is a picture that stands for the future of Israel, speaking from the time of the Prophet Ezekiel, which was a long long long time ago, before any of us had even existed. Back then, God said, he would make Israel a great kingdom, to show the glory of God to many nations.

When we move to the New Testament, Jesus talked about another story. A parable of the mustard seed, which we just read. The story here changed a little bit. Now the kingdom of God is a mustard seed that is very small, rather undesirable from the look, but God made it sprout and grow into a big shrub that all kinds of birds can nest under it.

In these two stories, we notice that the type of plants changed, from a cedar tree to a mustard shrub. The kingdom of God is no longer the great kingdom in the Old Testament, the one which was established and ruled by the great kings of Israel such as Saul, David and Solomon. However, in the New Testament the kingdom of God is founded on Jesus Christ. By his death and resurrection we can all take part in the kingdom of God together.

Now, some of you may wonder, can we connect these two kingdoms in the old and new testaments together? Of course we can. We can connect them like a Möbius Strip, which has two sides, like the two different stories in the Old Testament and the New Testament. A simple twist made by Jesus Christ, like the twist in the Möbius Strip, unites the two sides, and make them into one side.

### The Sermon

Continuity has great value in human life, but it is often underestimated. I recently have learned some wisdom from a friend of mine, who worked as a therapist in the area of children's wellbeing. She said, when parents go through their divorce, it is best not to transfer their children to other schools. This is because that maintaining stability in the child's educational environment is beneficial during the upheaval of a parental divorce. This applies to adults too. The stability and continuity in our life help us to deal with the changes and uncertainties that could bring us great challenges. It is essential to our sense of security to be able to maintain some continuity during major life-changing events, during war and other upheavals. That is why the continuous faith in Christ is important to us. We need to have that sense of continuity and certainty that we can help us to go through the time of rapid change.

However, continuity is hard to maintain under some circumstances, or continuity stays hidden in such a subtle way that it takes considerable wisdom to identify. For example, when you move to a foreign country, it is hard to feel continuity in your life. In a foreign land, you may have to put up with different social protocols, to eat foreign food that you are not used to (maybe this is less a challenge for British

people, considering how food tastes like here). Or, this is getting a bit personal to me, in the worst scenario, you can't understand the joke that everyone else is laughing at in the foreign land. A particularly difficult joke for me to understand when I was learning the English sense of humour, was: why did the chicken cross the road. And the answer is, to get to the other side. When I heard about this joke for the first time many years ago, I went into a very deep thought. What is it funny about this joke? This Q&A about the chicken seemed to be so boring to me, and I could not figure out why it is funny. And this question took me five years to solve. One day, I had an epiphany, and finally I came to realise that this joke is funny, is exactly because it is nonsense/blather/prattle. I bet you can come up a better question to spend five years to think about. I didn't even spend that long to think about my dissertation. However, just when I thought the sense of humour in the English language is so wry, things just turned better suddenly right after I learned that there were many twists and turns to that chicken. For example, why did the chicken run away from the road? To avoid this joke. Or, sometimes, other characters join in the road-crossing march. For example, why did a dinosaur cross the road, because chicken did not exist yet. Why did a duck cross the road, to prove that he is no chicken!

This is rather like the Old Testament metaphor of the cedar and the New Testament parable of the mustard seed in today's readings. We can recognise that they are both plants that are praised for their magnificence, and the birds can nest under their branches and bushes. Although from a cedar tree to a mustard shrub, some people may exasperate at the shrinking size of plant, and Jesus clearly was not taking an Expansionary Growth Strategy to talk about the kingdom of God. [Unlike government's strategy to bring significant tax revenue increases from inflation.] But anyway ... the Messianic Vision that is implied in Ezekiel 17:22–24 is both kept and changed in the parable of the mustard seed. Jesus Christ, himself, is the key twist in the story that both unites and shifts the Messianic Vision. Like the derivatives of the chicken joke, there is a scheme that is still recognisable in the later versions of the story, Jesus talks about the kingdom of God as the universal vision of salvation for both Jews and gentiles. The Messianic Vision is still present in the Mustard seed parable, but the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has made all the difference.

Continuity is identified in the kingdom of God, as it is found in the promise of God both in Ezekiel 17 and Mark 4. The continuity of God's promise is like the Möbius Strip. Jesus unites the promise that God made to Israel's forefathers in the Old Testament, and transformed it into the promise of faith in the New Testament, like a Möbius Strip which has two sides but united in one. Jesus made two promises into one.

Also, I find that there is more to be learned from the Möbius Strip. Just as the Strip has no beginning and no end, so is God's love for us. It is eternal and unending. No matter where we are in life, we are always within the bounds of His love and grace. Just like the Möbius Strip, the continuity of God's love is a mystery that we may not fully understand. But God's ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. Finally, our life is like a Möbius Strip, too. Notice how the strip of paper transformed into something new and unique with just a simple twist. Similarly, when we allow God to work in our lives, He transforms us. What may seem like a simple change can lead to profound renewal and a new perspective.

And now, I have one last question to ask you. Why did the chicken cross a Möbius Strip? The answer is, to get to the SAME side.

Tara Qu

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