

Isn't the whole world a parable telling us how everything moves from the lesser to the greater, from the smallest beginnings to a universe of overwhelming proportions too staggering for the mind to comprehend? And I'm taken once more to the small girl staring through the gate at the intricate tree-house beckoning her on in the play-area at Harrold Country Park. One can imagine the excitement in that tiny bundle confronted by a climbable tree and a whole world opening up in her own imagination. And Mum arrives and she is through that gate like a shot and the next minute proudly showing the rest of the family around her country home. We're so used to the imagery of the Bible and perhaps of science too, for that matter, that we can fail to share in this excitement, this very primal wonder at how God – at how the universe – works, at how the one is mapped exactly on the other. And we then start to separate things out so that what science tells us and what God tells us become entirely separate realities and forget that it's the same world that is at issue. So parables, in this sense, are not merely coincidental ways of describing one process by another but 'come alive' precisely because as, I think Thomas Aquinas puts it, 'a truth about nature is a truth about God,' and if this parable of the seeds is about anything it's about 'growth' – how life works – always from the smaller to the greater. Human imagining, like that little girl's imagining, may exaggerate the implications of what we see but there's no escaping this process of growth, whether we see it in physical or spiritual terms. Growth, movement, dynamism is what it's all about. Our mistake is to try and arrest this process by, ironically perhaps, confining it to one moment in time when, for example, the Church or nation or, indeed, oneself, is at a peak, at its grandest physical or, indeed, spiritual splendour. So we confuse God's kingdom, God's will, with visible structures or good health, perhaps. But it's the process of sowing the seed which is at issue and this seed is always necessarily small – less, that is, than its effects. And the seed God sows in us and wishes to grow in us so that we might seed it in others, is the seed of God's love, the very force that drives the universe but which we can only see by a long stretch of the imagination or by a very small step of love such as opening a gate to a little girl desperate to climb a tree. So we mustn't give up on those small acts of kindness, those very small but essential beginnings, which constitute love at its grandest – it doesn't begin anywhere else. The kingdom really is present in such acts and, in this sense, as Thomas Merton puts it, the gate to heaven is everywhere.

And he may well have had William Blake in mind who famously saw '*a world in a grain of sand*' and went on to say elsewhere:

*'I give you the end of a golden string
Only wind it into a ball,
It will lead you in at Heaven's gate,
Built in Jerusalem's wall.'*

The devil is indeed in the detail, or, perhaps more originally, God is.

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