

PARABLE

A design proposal by Michael Cook
for the Winchester Cathedral Tapestry Project



The design is rooted in the natural and agricultural imagery contained in the parables of Christ in the gospels; it is not illustrative of a single parable, but is evocative of several. Seeds and growth, and the work of sowing and harvest, illustrate the ways - mundane and mysterious, gradual and sudden - in which the Kingdom comes. This imagery is ancient, simple and direct; regardless of religious belief, we can all recognise ourselves and our hopes in the fragility of the seed and its yearning for true flourishing.



Our Churches and Cathedrals are encrusted with natural imagery (though strangely the imagery of the seed itself seems underused, despite its presence in the gospels), and the Great Screen which surrounds the High Altar is itself bursting with many natural flourishes. Continuity with the structure of the screen is kept in the design by using strong underlying horizontals in the strata of earth in the frontal and layers of sky in the dorsal, and the overwhelming upward movement of the stonework is kept in the struggling seeds sending shoots to the surface, and the joyful, cruciform reaching of the plants. The colouring seeks to intensify the tones of the surrounding limestone, marble and woodwork, and subtleties become apparent as we move closer; transparent halo-like shapes, subliminal, rhythmical arcs and rays, and details of fossils and stars.



The challenge of producing a two part design is resolved by using not only the two parts of the tapestry, but also the space in between, to suggest our spiritual environment now, contrasted with the spiritual completion we look forward to.

The frontal part of the tapestry, where we kneel, represents the space we inhabit now; we experience some growth, but also live to a large extent in the dark, and move only gradually and falteringly towards the light. From this place of unknowing and incompleteness we look to our final fulfilment, our wholeness, represented by the flourishing plants of the dorsal. The priest, who represents Christ, inhabits the space in between, offering us spiritual nourishment now, in the form of bread and wine.

*the kingdom of God is as if a man
should scatter seed upon the ground
and should sleep and rise night and day
and the seed should grow
he knows not how*

Mark 4.26-27



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