

Sunday 17th June 2018
Trinity 3 (B)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Ezekiel 17.22-end
NT: 2 Corinthians 5.6-10,14-17
G: Mark 4.26-34

The kingdom of God. What is the kingdom of God? Where is it?

The word 'kingdom' implies the rule of a monarch. A person of entitlement, of power and authority, surrounded by a lavishness, a certain amount of opulence beyond the reach of the common people.

A kingdom should contain at least one palace, noted for its grandeur and wealth, for its many servants to maintain its upkeep. Respect, the rule of order, deference, are other words that link to the concept of kingdom.

Jesus talked all the time about the kingdom of God to the extent that even his closest disciples were half hoping for the establishment of this kingdom to take hold, to overturn the rule of the Romans, to make Jerusalem the centre of a world power. But Jesus told Pilate, as he stood bound before him, that his kingdom was not of this world, no all-powerful army was on its way to rescue him from the degradation and agony of the Cross.

Speaking in parables, Jesus likens the coming of the kingdom of God to the harvest. Seed is sown and then quietly with time and the right conditions, it takes hold and flourishes until the crop is fully grown, ripe and ready for harvesting.

Likewise, he compares the kingdom of God to a mustard seed, *this tiniest of seeds yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.*

What is Jesus telling us about his kingdom? Certainly, there is no pomp and circumstance. Don't look for gold and material wealth in God's kingdom. There will be no fine furnishings and marble pillars. Rather, like

the fully grown mustard seed, it is a place of sanctuary, of safety where all life may blossom and grow in the peace of its shelter.

The image of the tiny mustard seed is reminiscent of a similar seed that Julian of Norwich held in her hand in one of her visions of love. She was told that this seed represented all created matter and showed how small and seemingly insignificant Creation is in comparison to the Creator and yet despite all this, there is nothing that our Creator, our loving Lord, will not do for us. It is his love that gives us significance and worth.

So this is our challenge. This tiny mustard seed, the kingdom of God, will not miraculously grow to fruition without our input. We are all called to make our own unique contribution to its establishment.

God doesn't need our help but still he asks for it. He wants us to be partakers in his kingdom.

This is how the Preface for Eucharistic Prayer F describes it:-

Again and again you drew us into your covenant of grace. You gave your people the law and taught us by your prophets to look for your reign of justice, mercy and peace.

As we watch for the signs of your kingdom on earth, we echo the song of the angels in heaven,

So now we know the what the kingdom of God looks like. It is a place where there is justice, mercy and peace. Not just for the select few but for all humanity, all God's creation, even the sparrows of the air.

And we have help to find where is the kingdom of God, through the law and the prophets, through scripture and the sacraments, through the example of Jesus' ministry. With all these tools, we are called to grow the mustard seed until it reaches its full potential, the kingdom of God on earth. We are called to root it in the life-giving soil of justice, to water it with mercy and to shelter it in the warmth and light of peace.

We can do this not by grand gestures but by the day to day encounters we have with those around us.

We can do it by being open to the voice of the Holy Spirit who will lead us to those in need, those we can help. And we are called to act not with an air of superiority or with condescension but by simply loving our neighbours as ourselves.

After this service today, there will be just such an opportunity. Asylum Link Merseyside are coming to talk about the work that they are doing in our city with people like ourselves but who now find themselves, for many reasons, away from their country of birth, people who have lost homes and possessions, people whose mental health has suffered as a result of the stressful situations they have experienced.

Asylum Link is based in St Anne's, Overbury Street and is fundamentally about helping people to help themselves, giving them knowledge and support to enable them to establish their lives in our city, to make Liverpool their home. Asylum Link is looking to bring justice, mercy and peace to refugees. Please come up after coffee and listen to what they have to say. Then you are invited to join us for a simple lunch and make a contribution to the work of Asylum Link.

Kingdoms often have representatives abroad, people who are chosen to work for the interests of their country in other lands. Further on in his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul says this:-

So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us

So let us work for the kingdom of God in this world until his reign is fully established and all people are treated with the respect and dignity that they deserve as children of God and heirs of the promise of eternal life. Amen.

The Revd Michelle Montrose