

Sunday 7th July 2019
Trinity 3 (C)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Isaiah 66.10-14
NT: Galatians 6.7-16
G: Luke 10.1-11,16-20

‘Yet know this; the kingdom of God has come near.’

He’s in a world of his own. As someone with a terribly poor attention span, this is a phrase I often hear, snapping me back into the land of the living from whatever bizarre daydream I might have been indulging in. Invariably it makes me think what I might have missed in the world or worlds that were not my own. How much have I missed, how much, more broadly, do we miss, by indulging in introspection, by focussing on our own petty concerns rather than that which surrounds us. How many moments of joy sweep past us as near misses, lost due to our own insistence on internal wranglings?

I would suggest that this is as much a theological issue as a social one (or however else it is you want to categorise switching off mid conversation) and that it becomes particularly clear in our notions of the Kingdom of God. It is a phrase we hear a lot in the Bible, in our theology, in our faith. But what does it actually mean? There is a temptation to marry concepts of the kingdom to the pervading individualism of our time- to view it either as a sort of abstract balancing of the chakras coming to some sort of imagined inner peace or, much more worryingly, a magic scenario in which all our wishes are granted, where we all drive a Ferrari and endless prosperity. Neither, I would venture, is the vision of the Kingdom set out by our readings from scripture this morning.

In the Gospel reading, the Kingdom is a wild and weird thing, a whirlwind of sickness healing, scorpion crushing madness that descends on a town via the medium of the seventy two who are sent out. Now, in discerning what the Kingdom of God might look like, I am

not proposing to tell you that you should leave this place with a randomly allocated partner, hop in a bus to Chester Zoo and go stamping on their arachnids enclosure. Instead I would suggest that this description of the Kingdom points us explicitly to it being something outside of us. When Christ says, in Luke 17, that the Kingdom of God is among you, he points us not into our own angst ridden consciousness but to one another. In our lesson today, we hear that the Kingdom of God comes near when people engage with one another in the spirit of love and according to the direct command of Christ. The kingdom, a transformed world, therefore, is necessarily relational. It requires a relationship with our fellow sojourners on this earth, the rest of humanity, and it requires, most importantly, a relationship with Jesus Christ, who knew that earthly life, but also is the pre-existent, death defying delight of the heavenly host. A wild, weird thing indeed.

The Kingdom of God is vested in that which is beyond ourselves, it might be found, indeed, it can only be found, if we look further than our own blinkered horizon. It is found in our neighbour, it is found in the communion of saints, it is found, above all, whenever we encounter the presence of God. The vision of the Kingdom we have here is manifestly one of community- of encounter with one another in faith and by so doing, we help make present love, which is, of course, the calling card of God.

In our gospel, the crucial sentence is this- 'Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven'. This is the promise of the Kingdom. A promise not rooted in the ways of this world, but in the ways of God. So it is that the Kingdom seems heralded by all these unlikely harbingers- healing, power over demons- for what else is the miraculous, but the signs of the heavenly breaking through to the earthly, an interruption of our introspection, a flash into this world of the dead by the world of the eternally living?

Of course, in turning us away from our own angst, God does not ignore our tribulations- the trials that so often cause our sorrows and internal preoccupations here on earth but He does point us in the direction of a resolution that is outside ourselves, namely, that is found by rest in him. In our reading from the prophet Isaiah, God promises that we shall be comforted in Jerusalem. Again, no need to rush from here and book tickets on the cheapest flight to the Holy Land (though if you are planning a holiday our very own Father Yazid has any number of excellent recommendations. We need not scarp for the earthly Jerusalem because this is a promise carried over to the Heavenly Jerusalem, the transformed creation, the very capital of the Kingdom of God. How is it that we will be comforted there? Because to dwell there is to dwell in the presence of God, and so to dwell in perfect peace.

Paul, in the lesson we heard from Galatians tells us that 'a new creation is everything'. This cannot simply be a new creation of our hearts, a creation rooted in our own desires, a Kingdom of a God we have created in our own image, but one that is nothing short of utterly transformational of our humanity. It is all well and good to say God loves us as we are, but unless we acknowledge that to engage with the Kingdom we necessarily must be transformed, then we are, in essence, rejecting that love. We are left, then, with a choice- will we recognise the life of the kingdom and embrace it, or will we continue in a world of our own, focussed only on the here and now and our internal processing of it? Which town will we be when the Kingdom of God passes by?

For there are signs of the kingdom all around. This world of true life breaks through into our world all the time if we are brave enough to look. In healings and hopefulness, in care and in community, and above all, in the breaking of bread. The veil is never thinner than when we come to receive the body and blood of Christ and so fulfil his command. For we are not in a world of our own, but in a world that is fearfully and wonderfully made by the Father, gloriously redeemed from its manifest sin by the Son, and joyously sustained by the

Spirit. The Kingdom is beyond our own petty introspections and yet, by the grace of God and the sacrifice of Christ, it is open to us. So come lift up your heads, come out from yourselves, come and join with your neighbours here and with all those across the world and across the ages, come to where the veil is at its thinnest, come unto the table of the Lord. Come, and know this, the kingdom of God will come near.

Fr Fergus Butler-Gallie