

Sunday 26th July 2020
7th Sunday after Trinity (A)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: I Kings 3.5-12
NT: Romans 8.26-end
G: Matthew 13.31-33,44-52

I hope I'm not the only preacher who is eager to check the readings for their allotted Sunday. I know it is the Bible, I hold the Gospels to be sacred but there are some readings when your heart sinks and prayer is the only remedy. What in heavens name do you want me to say about this Lord?

However, I think I've won the jackpot this week, any of the three readings would do nicely. The grace of God, the love of God and the kingdom of God, the basis for every sermon.

Following on from the parables of the seed and the sower and the wheat and tares, Jesus uses various images to describe the kingdom of God. He starts with the mustard seed, the smallest of seeds which grows into a great shrub, providing shelter for the birds. The kingdom of God, not immediately recognisable as a mighty force. Something which would be easy to overlook, to dismiss as petty and worthless and yet with the right conditions becomes this fine creation, not just beautiful in itself but a safe haven, a comfort in a torrid world.

He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'

Again, by itself yeast is not very exciting, certainly not edible and sustaining.

But mixed with the right ingredients, with flour, it becomes a staple source of nourishment.

Yeast brings a transforming life to simple flour to create bread. The kingdom of God requires our input, our flour, to flourish and to bring us to life, to transform us from mundane to glorious. It requires some effort on our part as the woman had to mix until all was leavened.

The next two parables tell stories of great treasure and the pearl which is worth selling everything for in order to obtain it.

The kingdom of God, *a condition of complete simplicity costing not less than everything*, using Eliot's phrase. The German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, talked about costly grace, we have to see a value in the kingdom of God, we have to be willing to sacrifice everything for it, if we wish to obtain its true treasures. He described the reverse, *cheap grace as a grace that requires no repentance, no sacrifice and ultimately no cross*.

And we believe that if there is no cross, there can be no resurrection, the ultimate sign of God's kingdom.

The kingdom of God, not immediately obvious to the untrained soul but a place of shelter and solace, a transformation that requires some work on the part of the faithful to bring it to fruition, a treasure beyond price that *demands my soul, my life, my all*.

The kingdom of God is where we can be fully ourselves, the person that God created us to be, the place where his love reigns and everything else is so much dust.

There will be many lessons to learn from the past few months, much to reflect on about the pandemic and its impact on so much that we once took for granted. We value life itself just that bit more having seen how silently and how swiftly it can be taken away.

We will no longer view simple journeys out to the shops or the pub in the same complacent way. We have come to a greater appreciation of the work of so many, not just the NHS staff but refuse workers, delivery drivers, hairdressers. Who ever imagined that they would be happy to queue to go to the tip!

And we all know how much we missed this place, St Nick's. So much was done under Fr Crispin's leadership to keep us together as a community, to continue to mark the Church's year in the worship of God, to go on preaching the Gospel of Christ but it couldn't be quite the same.

It wasn't the coffee or the chance to catch up with each other and welcome new people, important though those things are. I think it was the opportunity to pause as one in the presence of God, to open our lives to his grace and with one voice to worship and adore him for the love he lavishes upon us. It was the ability to experience the kingdom of God in all its glory, that's what we missed when we couldn't be here together.

There is another line from Eliot that I like to reflect on –
to kneel where prayer has been valid.

We worship God here where so many have done for more than seven centuries. While the world has changed beyond recognition, while we feel that our world has recently changed in such a profound way, God and his kingdom have remained steadfast and there for humankind. In the glorious words of Paul in the Jerusalem Bible version

For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth, nor any created thing, can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The kingdom of God sheltering, transforming, demanding is within and without us.

The kingdom of God, our happy place. Amen.

The Revd Michelle Montrose