

Sunday 26th July 2020

Good morning and welcome to worship here at MPN on Sunday 26th July.

Wherever and whenever you join us we are glad you have come to join with us.

A reminder that you can join us for coffee on Zoom at 12 for a catch up. It's been great just to have a chat with each other again.

Another week gone and I notice how quickly the time is flying by, some folks tell me that comes with age!!

This week on my time out I managed to get to the beach for a walk up the coast. The rhythm of the sea helps us to concentrate on the rhythms of life. The ebbing and flow and the going out and coming in. There are times in life when we wait and this is one of those times for us all and in this waiting time as we have said before, if we draw on the strength of God to linger and to learn what is it God is saying to us for the time we leave this time. Life ebbs and flows, and God is with us in all of life.

Call to worship:

A tiny seed planted can grow to a mighty tree.

**In small numbers we worship today,
but as part of a mighty Church worldwide.**

A tiny bit of yeast can make the loaf rise.

**Tempted to feel small and alone,
we rise to worship, part of a greater whole.**

**Wondering at the worth
of our presence and praise at home,
we worship today offering what combined treasures we have.**

Reading Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

Today again we are right in the middle of Jesus teaching about the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is teaching these parables to the rural community of his day, everyday things that would have been so familiar to them. The farming illustrations would have grounded the gospel in everyday life for them. Sometimes today we miss the point of these parables as some of our communities are so removed from our lives today.

Maybe we would have

“the Kingdom of Heaven is like a tweet that spreads around the world and is liked by some, retweeted by others, and piled on by online trolls and bots’ intent on harassing and abusing the tweeter.”

Or “the Kingdom of Heaven is like a cat video, shared by a widow online on Facebook, and bringing laughter and joy to strangers on the other side of the globe.”

Or “the Kingdom of Heaven is like an e-book, perfect and new for every reader.”

The parables of Jesus were not meant to give their listeners an easy answer, in fact at uni my lecturers told us not to explain them away but to give our congregation ways to use their imagination and to work out an answer.

Jesus as always love to ask us questions and to get us to work our way through to the answers. We’ve not to be spoon fed but to but the hard work in and develop our faith, through study and prayer and interaction with others in our faith community.

“I will open my mouth in parables,

I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.”

This is not gentle Jesus meek and mild, who many of us have the picture from Sunday School in our head. Jesus sitting with a lamb surrounded by calm children. No this is Jesus who if revolutionary, who’s message should turn lives around and the world upside down. This is what he is trying to get us all to think about in these readings today. Jesus again expands on his vision of the Kingdom here on earth and again we have that tension of living here and thinking ahead to the kingdom of God. The tension of the now but not yet.

The Kingdom of God, for Jesus the Palestinian revolutionary, is completely invasive. It might look small and it may even be sown in desperation and out of poverty - but it will grow and grow and will invade the land and eventually become a sanctuary for others to find rest in.

The Kingdom of God, therefore, comes as a threat to those who cling to the old-world order. Jesus of Nazareth wants God’s Kingdom to invade and dominate the land and that is the message he is prepared to live and die for.

And if we have not yet got the point about the Kingdom of God being threatening, uncontainable and invasive, Jesus the Palestinian revolutionary follows it up with another little story in verse 33: "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."

Ah, the Great British Bake Off...now we know what Gentle Jesus is talking about! The woman in her kitchen, kneading the dough whilst her children play around her, the lovely smell of freshly baking bread hangs in the air, perhaps the kitchen door is opening out onto a lovely little garden where the husband sits and reads his newspaper with the faithful family dog sitting at his feet. An idyllic family scene – a comfortable image for us – from Gentle Jesus.

But Gentle Jesus didn't tell this parable.

This parable was told by Jesus, the Palestinian revolutionary, who was prepared to live and die to see a new world order come in to being...

So, what did yeast mean to the first hearers of this parable? Well, of course, yeast was to be avoided at the most holy times of the year: Unleavened Bread was the order of the day. And elsewhere, Jesus used the symbol of yeast to describe the insidious, subversive behaviour of the Pharisees. For those people who lived in an agricultural, even nomadic culture, yeast was pretty hard to handle. It was unpredictable, it bubbled up, it oozed, it collapsed, it grew again. It was hard to handle in that culture and, at certain times, was to be avoided altogether. If you have ever baked bread and I don't profess to be an expert, you will know that it never turns out the same size every time. Yeast works in a very unpredictable way and Jesus was trying to set the scene for the breakthrough of the kingdom.

So again, Jesus is not giving us a neat and comfortable image here: The Kingdom of Heaven is unpredictable. It bubbles up from within and completely transforms the environment in which it grows.

In Church we have plans and visions and there have been so many new programmes and so many of these focus on what happens within a Church community and mainly has been about what happens in a building. But Jesus told parables to the folks out where they were. In the fields, in the town centre, at their place of work. The kingdom being formed in ordinary places.

The five marks of the Church Tell, Teach, Tend, Treasure and Transform, each of these words speak of relationship with people. Our mission if you like is to tell the story of the Gospel, to all, to teach and disciple people by building relationships and communities of faith. To care and look after those around us, those folks that God has placed for us to look after. We then have to love them and treasure them and the lives transform one at a time. No one said this will be a quick and easy process, it will be a bit unpredictable at times. There will be one step forward and three steps back, because we are all human and we are all broken. But if we don't keep trying, and have patience and faith, a bit like my bread making and if I try to cut corners and don't kneed enough or prove enough, it's not been given the right conditions. God will give us all we need to build his kingdom and when the time is right he will fulfil his promises.

I read a story this week, nine people tried to find the right Church, they searched and searched and could not find one that met all their needs. Some had the wrong songs, too long/too short a service, the sermon did nothing for them and on and on. They spoke to a wise man and he told them each one of you are the Church, go and tell, teach, tend, treasure and transform the world around you. The Church will be unpredictable and sometimes messy and this is what Jesus is telling the crowd in our readings today.

I said last week we pray

“your kingdom come, your will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven.”

Prayer is a powerful thing and if we really are serious about it transformation and upheaval will come.

And it is in all the mess that we will create together that beauty will be found. Because, as Jesus told us in the parable in verse 45, it takes a lot of searching to find a pearl. But once it is found, the search will have been worth it...

“Your kingdom come...”

Be careful what you pray for - because the Kingdom of heaven is like that proclaimed by Jesus, the Palestinian revolutionary, not like some imaginary Gentle Jesus, meek and mild. It is subversive and it is messy, and if we want to embrace the Kingdom, we must embrace the revolutionary nature of the kingdom and the inevitable mess that this causes...

Jesus, the Palestinian revolutionary walked the streets of Israel. He walked the streets of Gaza and the West Bank. And when he saw social injustice and oppression and marginalisation, he spoke out against it. His was a subversive ministry – his was a messy ministry.

Jesus was a Palestinian revolutionary who was prepared to die for the liberation of his people because he knew that the coming of the Kingdom of heaven was the ultimate goal of liberation. That was the mission of Jesus of Nazareth. And we, as a church, as invited into that mission today. It will be uncomfortable, it will be messy - but that's the Kingdom of heaven for you.

Are we truly going to become a Mission Shaped Church? Then we need to pray, “Your Kingdom come”.

But be careful what you pray for...

Blessing (Morag)

Lord,
teach us we are never so small, so insignificant,
as to be of low value to you.

Help us to know how precious we are.

As we go,
cast us into the world;
show us where to go
that we might meet the world's need, from the bounty of gifts and talents, stored in the treasure chest
of the person you have made us to be.

And as we go into another week with God

We go with the blessing of God Almighty

Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Be with you and all those you love

Now and forever more

Amen.