

Sunday 26 July 2020

Call to Worship: Come, bring your mustard seed of hope, bring your yeast of expectation, your treasure of thanksgiving. Bring the pearls that are your prayers, bring the net of your lives. Come, you who are called, you who are justified, you who are glorified. Come, for it is the Lord Jesus who calls you.

Hymn:

1 The kingdom of God is justice and joy; for Jesus restores what sin would destroy. God's power and glory in Jesus we know and here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.
2 The kingdom of God is mercy and grace; the captives are freed, the sinners find place, the outcast are welcomed God's banquet to share; and hope is awakened in place of despair.
3 The kingdom of God is challenge and choice: believe the good news, repent and rejoice! His love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross: our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.
4 God's kingdom is come, the gift and the goal; in Jesus begun, in heaven made whole. The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call and all things cry 'glory!' To God all in all.
Bryn Rees (1911-1983) Singing the Faith 255

Prayer of Adoration & Confession:

Living Lord, we are glad to be here today. We praise you for the good gifts you give to us day by day, for the safety of our home environment and the growth in technology which enables our meeting. We praise you for speaking to us, through your word the bible and supremely through your word, the Lord Jesus. For his living amongst ordinary human beings and pointing the way to you, Abba father, we are so thankful.

We praise you too for the gift of the holy spirit, comforter, counsellor, challenger, enabler. At this time of worship we pray that we would know your presence with us and that you would draw us closer to you, through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Forgive us, loving God, when we stop looking for treasure, forget your gifts to us, give up reading your word.

Forgive us when we give up the yeast of our faith and our lives go flat.

Forgive us when we don't cast out our nets, but stay on shore, complacent and unenthusiastic.

Forgive us, inspire us and renew us, in Jesus' name.

Amen

Bible reading: Matthew 13: 31-33 & 44-52

Just imagine.....

Jesus looked at the crowd around him and was overwhelmed by his love for them. How could he make them understand what living within God's kingdom was really like? He pulled the seeds off a plant and rubbed them absent-mindedly between his fingers, as he began to speak:

'Just imagine, the tiniest of all seeds in any of these surrounding gardens – the mustard seed. Well, imagine the kingdom of heaven's like that seed! It seems so tiny, and yet it becomes one of the largest plants in the garden – even the birds can come and make their homes in it'.

A man close by was eating his lunch, and Jesus grabbed the bread. 'And imagine the tiny amount of yeast in a whole batch of bread', he said, taking a bite, 'but the dough works through it. Imagine the kingdom of heaven at work like that!'

The Jesus glimpsed the flash of a ring in the sun. 'And just imagine treasure found in a field like this one. Imagine the kingdom of heaven is like that treasure; when a man found it, he was so excited he hid it again and then went and sold everything he had, so that he could buy that field, and get the treasure, too!'

By now, those listening were smiling back at Jesus, caught in his excitement. Jesus spotted a pearl on a chain around someone's neck. 'And imagine a pearl...the sort of pearl that merchants spend their lives trying to find. Imagine one of those merchants finding it one day and selling everything he had just to have it – imagine the kingdom of heaven a bit like that!'

'And imagine', Jesus laughed in delight, smelling cooked fish in someone else's lunch, 'a fishing net, thrown into the water and gathering fish of every kind, and at the end of the day, the good fish are separated out, just as the angels will do to you in the kingdom of heaven. Just imagine it!'

And they left that place that day, knowing more of God's love and his kingdom, and about the extraordinary from the ordinary. Just imagine!

This week we have another Gospel passage where Jesus is the teacher, using everyday examples to show what the Kingdom of God is like. Just as Jesus tends to choose the simple folk with no formal training as his disciples, so he roots his teaching in things that were around him, that his hearers were familiar with. Some parables are mysterious or subversive but these are more about awakening imagination and helping people to find the extraordinary among the ordinary.

What were the important seeds that were planted in your life when you were young? How have they grown? How are you using them now? What seeds do you think the church needs to plant in the world to make it more like the kingdom of God?

What are the treasures in your life? Who are the people you value most? What are your best gifts or skills? How do you show your commitment to these people or skills?

When you were young, what were the values that your parents or guardians taught you? How did you learn to choose between good and bad things? What are the hardest decisions you have had to make, especially regarding moral dilemmas? Who or what helps you make such decisions?

What traditional things in Christianity do you think are really important? What things do you think need to be brought up to date? What new things need to be brought into Christian life?

Prayers of intercession:

We praise you, Lord Jesus, for the richness of the parables that root our faith in the ordinary and yet transform it. Increase in us a sense of wonder, that we might see signs of your kingdom wherever we are, and bless us with the words to tell new stories of your love and grace to all we meet.

God of heaven and also God of the ordinary, we pray for all who are searching today

- For the precious pearl to give life meaning;
- For those longing for reconciliation with those they have wronged, or who have wronged them;
- For those who find themselves imprisoned within narrow lives or by the spite of others;
- For those who have such a low idea of self that they feel worthless and unlovable;
- For those who are ill and need a healing touch;
- For those mourning a loved one and longing for comfort.

To you, Lord of love, we entrust our prayers. Amen.

The Lord's prayer

Hymn – Seek ye first the Kingdom of God

Blessing:

May the joy of the kingdom go with you.

May the peace of the kingdom sustain you

and may you know the king of the kingdom, Jesus Christ, to be your Friend and Saviour as you journey through this week. Amen