

# **Christ Church, Ipswich**

*Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2020*

## **Sunday Worship**

With Revd Neil Coulson

Hello, I hope you are well. This week, our focus will be on Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52 where Jesus tells some more parables about 'the kingdom of heaven'. Let us worship God together.

### **Call to worship**

As we enter God's holy presence this morning,  
are you ready to hear again about God's kingdom?  
Come, open your hearts and minds  
to see the kingdom around us and within us.  
Come, and worship the living God. **Amen.**

### **A gathering prayer**

Lord God, as we worship you today,  
we thank you for your presence, here with us.  
Thank you, Lord, that each one of us is unique,  
yet we share a common bond in you.  
We worship together as one body,  
but we all learn and experience things in different ways.  
We thank you for your amazing word  
that gives us so many pictures of your kingdom.  
Something for everyone,  
something to feed our hearts and minds.  
Be with us, Lord,  
and bless us richly as we call upon your name. **Amen.**

### **Jesus shall reign where'er the sun**

does his successive journeys run;  
his kingdom stretch from shore to shore,  
till moons shall wax and wane no more.

For him shall endless prayer be made,  
and praises throng to crown his head;  
his name like sweet perfume shall rise  
with every morning sacrifice.

People and realms of every tongue  
dwell on his love with sweetest song,  
and infant voices shall proclaim  
their early blessings on his name.

Blessings abound where'er he reigns;  
the prisoners leaps to lose their chains;  
the weary find eternal rest,  
and all who suffer want are blessed.

Let every creature rise and bring  
peculiar honours to our King;  
angels descend with songs again,  
and earth repeat the loud Amen.

## A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

For the signs of your kingdom,  
in gestures as small as tiny mustard seeds,  
in simple kindnesses that can mean so much:

**We give you thanks.**

For the way your kingdom takes hold  
and grows like yeast in a batch of dough,  
with the determination and persistence that good will prevail:

**We give you thanks.**

For the way we see your kingdom in surprising places,  
such as the discovery of treasure in a field,  
and unlikely people doing unexpected things:

**We give you thanks.**

For the price people pay for your kingdom,  
like a pearl, more costly than all the other jewels in the world,  
because it asks for commitment and sacrifice:

**We give you thanks.**

For the way your kingdom spreads  
like a net catching enough fish to feed the world,  
irresistible, powerful, with a love that overcomes all:

**We give you thanks.**

**Amen.**

## Bible Reading: Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

### *The Parable of the Mustard Seed*

<sup>31</sup> He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; <sup>32</sup> it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'

### *The Parable of the Yeast*

<sup>33</sup> He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with <sup>[a]</sup> three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'

### *Three Parables*

<sup>44</sup> 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

<sup>45</sup> 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; <sup>46</sup> on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

<sup>47</sup> 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; <sup>48</sup> when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. <sup>49</sup> So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous <sup>50</sup> and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

### *Treasures New and Old*

<sup>51</sup> 'Have you understood all this?' They answered, 'Yes.' <sup>52</sup> And he said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.'

## Reflection

Our Gospel reading today brings before us another six parables regarding the kingdom of heaven. In the first parable, we read that *'the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed'*. The small mustard seed measuring about 1mm may be contrasted with the rather large mustard bush which might grow to be 2-3 metres tall. The comparison stresses that although God's kingdom may seem insignificant and small at the moment, dramatic growth is coming. There is a deeper significance to the parable: In the Hebrew Bible, trees often symbolize rule and birds represent God's oppressed people (Judges 9:7-15, Ezekiel 17:22-24, 31:1-18, Dan 4:10-26). So here, God's kingdom may seem as if it's small, almost invisible and making little impact, but there's good news: His kingdom will become a life-sustaining tree as God's just and cosmic rule and reign will be established over all.

We then read of how the *'the kingdom of heaven is like yeast'*. Yeast in dough had to be cleaned out of Jewish houses before Passover (Exodus 12). It is sometimes used to picture the spread of negative things from a small start (for example, 1 Corinthians 5: 6-8). Yeast was viewed as contaminating and certainly, God's kingdom would contaminate cultural norms within the Roman Empire such as hierarchy, patriarchy and injustice. God's rule might seem to be small, secretive and insignificant now, but this is just the start – it will have a mighty and wide-ranging effect.

The next two parables tell us that *'the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field'* and *'like a merchant in search of fine pearls'*. An interesting note: Pearls were more valuable than gold at that time. Both these parables convey something of the great value of the kingdom in comparison with anything else life might offer. They also both echo, from the mustard seed and yeast, the idea that the kingdom is not easily noticed at first. Here, the repetition is both deliberate and purposeful as it stresses the importance of the message.

The fifth parable in our reading says that *'the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind'*. The dragnet that indiscriminately catches fish, both good and bad, will no doubt remind us of last week's parable of the wheat and weeds (13: 24-30). The parable comes with an explanation which speaks of the separation of good from evil that will happen at the end of the age, and of the persistence of evil agency until then. As mentioned last week, we remember that Matthew's outlook includes an apocalyptic and eschatological perspective. Whilst the specifics regarding the scoop of the net and the future separation are not entirely clear, more certain here is an obvious focus on the future establishing of God's just rule.

Finally, Jesus tells us a parable about teachers trained for the *'the kingdom of heaven'*. Scribes were those who interpreted God's instructions in the Scriptures so that the people would know how to live God's way. Perhaps, this parable indicates that, in God's kingdom, those who have been trained in kingdom ways, just as the disciples have, will draw on their Jewish heritage of knowing God's ways but also on the new things that Jesus is showing them. They live in continuity with Israel but they also reinterpret the Scriptures and its practices in light of their relationship with Jesus.

As we reflect on these parables today, no doubt many thoughts come to our minds. May I suggest a couple of questions that we may wish to consider: Firstly, it seems as though we are surrounded by injustice right now. From the distressing plight of the Uighur people at the hands of the Chinese authorities to our continual destruction of the natural world which exponentially affects the world's poorest, evil and injustice are never far away. As God's people, how might we be those who stand up against injustice whenever and wherever we find it? How might we work for a more just and 'cared for' world and be those who are agents of God's just rule and reign? We are reminded that small, seemingly insignificant acts can have a transformative, life-sustaining impact on our world and its people.

Secondly, what do we most value? Where does *'the kingdom of heaven'* with its potent ways of love, forgiveness and justice for all, feature in our values and how we live our lives? Can we live in continuity with our Christian traditions whilst also forging ahead into the new, reinterpreting the Scriptures and reshaping our way of living in light of our relationship with Jesus? Can we be radical followers of Jesus who love, embrace and welcome all in our community and as such be a Church which lovingly reveals that the *'the kingdom of heaven is near'* (Matthew 3:2). Amen.

### **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.

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.

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.

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 Austin Rees (1911-83)

### **Our prayers of intercession**

A prayer by Archbishop Dr Antje Jackelen, Church of Sweden

O loving God of life, God of compassion,

As crisis is shaking our world, we turned to you with all our worries:  
for our loved ones, for our societies, for jobs and economies,  
and for how the most vulnerable among us will be affected.  
Transform uncertainty and fear into love and care.  
Give us courage, wisdom and consolation.

Trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray:  
for the sick and those who are caring for them,  
for the researchers who are working to find  
medicine and vaccine,  
for those who must take difficult decisions  
that affect many,  
for international cooperation  
in the service of justice and peace,  
for spiritual leadership  
that is faithful to your will.

In your mercy,  
 help us to hold on to what is right, true and beautiful.  
 through Jesus Christ, whom we have come to know as our saviour and healer.

**Amen**

**We pray also today** for those close to us:  
 protect them, surround them in your love, and in sorrow and in joy, be with them.

We pray for Margaret Widdowson, so thankful that she has now returned home after a stay in hospital.  
 We pray for Joan Cross as she faces challenges with her health.  
 We pray for Ellen Naunton who is experiencing some concerns with her health at the moment.  
 We give thanks for the life of Sybil Nicholls.  
 Her funeral will be on the 3<sup>rd</sup> August and we pray for her son, Lawrence and all her family.

*A moment of quiet for your own prayers for our broken world and those in need.*

Loving God, hear all these our prayers,  
 through Jesus Christ our Lord,

**Amen.**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

We pray together with confidence, as Jesus taught us:

Our Father,  
 who art in heaven,  
 hallowed be thy name;  
 thy kingdom come;  
 thy will be done;  
 on earth as it is in heaven.  
 Give us this day our daily bread,  
 and forgive us our trespasses,  
 as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
 Lead us not into temptation;  
 but deliver us from evil.  
 For thine is the kingdom,  
 the power and the glory,  
 for ever and ever. Amen.

**Here is love vast as the ocean,**  
 loving kindness as the flood,  
 when the Prince of life, our ransom  
 shed for us His precious blood.  
 Who His love will not remember?  
 Who can cease to sing His praise?  
 He can never be forgotten  
 throughout heaven's eternal days.

On the Mount of Crucifixion  
 fountains opened deep and wide;  
 through the floodgates of God's mercy  
 flowed a vast and gracious tide.  
 Grace and love, like mighty rivers,  
 poured incessant from above,  
 and heaven's peace  
 and perfect justice  
 kissed a guilty world in love.

### **A sending out prayer**

Send us out, Lord:  
to love and to live,  
to act and to give,  
to pray and to serve.  
In Jesus' name.

**Amen.**

### **The Blessing**

May the blessing of God Almighty,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be upon us all, and those we love,  
and remain with us  
this day and always,

**Amen.**

### **The Grace**

Holding each other in our prayers, we say together:

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all,  
for evermore.  
Amen.**

As Rob mentioned in his email yesterday, I am now away on annual leave for three weeks. I'm delighted to say that next week, Revd David Thompson will be leading our worship, and then members of our own Emmaus Groups are leading our worship on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> August. Our sincere thanks go to those preparing and leading our Services over the next few weeks. Every blessing to you and your families for the coming weeks of summer and I look forward to being in contact with you again soon.

With our love and best wishes to you all,

*Neil*