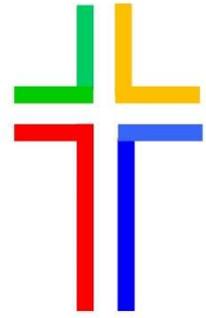


Week St Mary Methodist Church – Sunday 26 July



Last week we shared a simple Communion service together in person, which was a time of real blessing. But it is also a blessing to know that we have a large group of people sharing in these paper service sheets. Together we are the Church being a visible sign of God's Kingdom; and God's Kingdom is the theme of today's service.

PRAYER

Lord, as we read and sing and pray this service in our own homes, make us conscious of the very many other people who are part of your Christian community across the world. Some will be worshipping by themselves; some will be in large congregations; some will be meeting in

secret; some will be in public view; some will be part of elaborate rituals; some will be meeting in silence. But however we worship, Lord, be with us, and help our time of worship to lead to greater faith and deepening discipleship as part of your Kingdom here on earth. **Amen**

READING FOR TODAY Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52 (NIV)

The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast

³¹ He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.'

³³ He told them still another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about thirty kilograms of flour until it worked all through the dough.'

The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl

⁴⁴ 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

⁴⁵ 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

The parable of the net

⁴⁷ 'Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸ When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹ 'Have you understood all these things?' Jesus asked.

'Yes,' they replied.

⁵² He said to them, 'Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.'

REFLECTION

Right from the start of his ministry, when he began preaching in Galilee, Jesus said the Kingdom of Heaven is near. It is a phrase that John the Baptist had used. And later when Jesus sent out the twelve disciples he told them to say the same thing, the Kingdom of Heaven is near. In fact, in Matthew's Gospel the phrase Kingdom of Heaven occurs 29 times. Mark and Luke tended to use the phrase Kingdom of God instead, but theologians agree that it comes to the same thing, and

that phrase occurs frequently as well. Even so, in our reading today, Jesus is still telling parables to try to explain what God's Kingdom is like. Part of the explanation must be that many people in Judah expected a glorious Kingdom, ruled by a warrior King like David, one that would set the people of Israel free. But Jesus was having to manage expectations and show that the Kingdom of God wasn't going to be like that – it was justice and peace, rather than might and right; it was about the poor and dispossessed rather than the rich and powerful. And so Jesus tells a series of parables about different attributes of the Kingdom.

The first two, shared in all the first three gospels, are about the kingdom as something hidden, but present and spreading until it takes everyone by surprise. The smallest of seeds can grow into such a great shrub, providing shelter for all; the yeast is invisible, but spreading throughout the dough and making it all rise.

The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl are only in Matthew, and speak of the value of the kingdom. Nothing can be worth as much as this, it is worth giving up everything else in order to have it.

The final parable of the fish caught in the net echoes the parable of the weeds (last week), and speaks of the need for good and bad to be allowed to continue together until the time is right for the sorting to take place. At the right time, despite current appearances to the contrary, God will achieve his final purposes.

PRAYER FOR OTHERS

In today's reading a merchant sold everything he had in order to buy a precious pearl. Jesus tells us that working to make the world as God wants it to be is just like buying the pearl; it's worth everything we've got. Let's reflect on that and think what God might be wanting us to do in order to make our lives, our homes, our church, our places of work into places where His kingdom can be seen.

In today's reading Jesus said the Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast which works through the dough and causes it to rise. Let's reflect on that and ask ourselves if we are like the yeast, making a difference to the society in which we live, being an ingredient that brings God's Kingdom closer.

In today's reading Jesus said the Kingdom of Heaven is like a fishing net full of good fish and bad. Let's reflect on that and think whether we are amongst the good fish who can be seen to be true witnesses for God's Kingdom.

We ask these prayers in Jesus name. Amen

HYMN StF 489 (and on the CD)

All I once held dear, built my life upon
All this world reveres and wars to own

All I once thought gain I have counted loss
Spent and worthless now compared to this

*Chorus: Knowing You, Jesus, knowing You
There is no greater thing
You're my all, You're the best
You're my joy, my righteousness
And I love You Lord*

Now my heart's desire is to know You more
To be found in You and know as Yours
To possess by faith what I could not earn
All surpassing gift of righteousness

Oh to know the power of Your risen life
And to know You in Your sufferings
To become like You in Your death, my Lord
So with You to live and never die

BLESSING

Lord, as we go through this week, guide our steps, and light our path, so that we may be the very best we can be for You. And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be upon you and remain with you always. Amen

"I have tried drugs and a little of everything else, and there is nothing in the world more soul-satisfying than having the kingdom of God building inside you and growing."

Johnny Cash