

# **The Kingdom of God**

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8th after Trinity

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Genesis 15.1-6

Hebrews 11.1-3,8-16

Luke 12.32-40

## **Coming Home**

As a young man I studied engineering and would live in central London. The studies were engrossing I made new friends but I was living in a very urban environment.

I can remember coming back home after a couple of months. As I rode in the bus from the station to my parents home I was overwhelmed by all the trees and all of the leafy greenness which quite frankly I had forgotten.

It was as if I had moved from one very artificial environment to one that had much more of nature in it. I was struck by how those few months away had changed me and I had got used to an environment that was rather bleak.

We can get used to the way life is and even if it is not very fulfilling we stop to asking the questions and we aren't expecting anything different.

The wonderful thing is that God is prepared to step in and reveal a fullness of life that is his ambition for us and the whole world.

## **Abram**

In our reading from Genesis we read of Abram. He has been led by God in a variety of ways but he still has a clear view of what he thinks can happen. He is now old and although he has had promises from God he still has a great sense of trust in his own understanding and abilities.

In our Old Testament reading God shows to Abram the night sky and says Abram will have as many descendants as the stars he can see. I can imagine Abram taking some time to gaze at the site with a beautiful stretch of the Milky Way before him and his imagination being stretched to the limit.

At just about every level Abram would have been challenged. His sight might have been very poor. We know the Milky Way contains hundreds of billions of stars although he might only have been able to see a few hundred. But we are told Abram believed. God had invited him into a far great vision of the world. It could not be understood in any clear way. Abram's ability's would not be able to contribute. So Abram said yes, accepted God's

revelation and we're told the gift of faith made Abram right with God.

## **The Kingdom of God**

I can imagine Jesus' ministry being very much like this.

Jesus turned up in his peoples history and rather than getting them to stare at the stars offered them a huge range of images and experiences. He sought to bring them out of the very small and rather mean view of God that they had into a vision of the Kingdom of God.

In all that he did Jesus captured people's attention. He told his parables, interpreted the laws, turned people upside down as they discovered they were loved and could live with hope. Jesus had a shorthand for what he was doing, he said he was bringing in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus started where people were. They were concerned with making a living, telling other people how to live their lives, licking their wounds from the pains of life. Jesus invited people into a new reality, open to everyone, challenging tidy assumptions and telling people he was the one who is going to fulfil the long history of his people.

## **Hebrews**

Our reading from the book of Hebrews is one of the classic texts about faith. It lists heroes of the Old Testament who were close to God. It was not because of their strength, wealth, cleverness or righteousness. It was because they believed.

We heard 'what is seen was made from things that are not visible'. As much as this world has been made glorious by God, there is so much that cannot be seen. It is only by faith that we can receive the whole life of God.

We also heard 'they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one'. This better country is the transformation of the world in which we live. It is heavenly because of the infusion of the presence of God.

Time and again when people responded to Jesus and accepted what he was doing he would praise them for their faith. Jesus came with a fresh way of living life. It required opening yourself up to new possibilities even in the face of having been defeated in the past.

## **Faith in Action**

For me one of the greatest testimonies about faith is Jesus' encounter with a Roman centurion. The centurion is part of the occupying power and so, deeply resented by the local people. And yet Jesus takes his request for his servant to be healed seriously and acts generously to give healing. When the Roman centurion responds with belief, Jesus says he hasn't found such great faith in all of Israel.

The Kingdom of God does not respect nationality, Romans count too. The Kingdom of God has qualities of valuing humans as the centurion does. The Kingdom of God seeks healing as Jesus demonstrates. And the Kingdom of God rejoices as Jesus does when he sees that the centurion has grasped the deep truth of how life operates.

## **Orange trees**

I remember being told about a college in Africa which was poor. It meant the food was very simple and very boring. This situation had gone on for many many years. Then one of the students decided it would be good to have oranges. So he planted and cultivated some orange trees. But the time for his course came to an end and he moved on. It was only after he had left the college that the oranges began to give fruit. That was why it did not happen before. That imaginative student had to realise he would have to act without benefiting himself. He believed life could be better and that he would do what he could for people who he would never meet.

That fellow operated in a different way from his colleagues and the world was transformed; not in a huge way but many advances are made out of many small steps.

## **Vigilance**

When we come to Luke's gospel Jesus is quite direct in his followers taking up their responsibilities. He says: 'Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit'. The Kingdom of God is not just an idea to have opinions about. The matter of faith is not just about a certain sort of positivity and trust that God is sorting things out. It is something to be understood, to guide our thoughts and to commit our actions too.

Jesus' parable is about vigilant people who are ready and not taken unawares. but the parable has a huge twist in it.

The master of the house arrives sits his servants down and serves them. In this Jesus is telling us

about the nature of God. God is not like an earthly master. His Kingdom is not run for his own profit. let alone with great power and tyranny. God is present and offers himself to serve us.

We see Jesus demonstrating this at the Last Supper in John's gospel when he washes his disciples feet. The Kingdom of God is about service because people who grasp the true value of human life seek everybody's life to flourish.

The greatest act of Jesus' servant nature is to go to the cross and through this act of humiliation, pain and death he achieves salvation for the human race.

So when Jesus says 'be vigilant' he is not in an autocratic way making demands of people who are going to have to bear the load. The Kingdom of God is to understand that God is himself at work and we are called to be alongside him.

## **The Lord's Prayer**

There are key things that Jesus told his followers to do. One was that we are to use the prayer he taught. We will use it later in this service.

It begins

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.

There is a danger in saying the same words over and over again. Familiarity breed contempt. But Jesus wants us to use these words regularly, thoughtfully and allow great treasure to fill our souls and lives.

God is like a good father, a kind master who is alongside us to enable our lives to escape the things that bring us down. He is present to show us a vision of healing and joy.

Jesus tells us to be asking for his kingdom to come, to see another way of life which fills us with new possibilities and hope.

We are to be formed in our prayers and the regular, careful and reflective use of the Lord's prayer is a great treasure to be received.

Jesus said 'the Kingdom of God is among you' (Luke 17.21). It's beginning is with us and we are privileged to grow and flourish as God is at work in our lives.