

24<sup>th</sup> July 2020

Dear Friends,

Once again how are you doing, as I sit and write this I am aware that alongside the easing of restrictions for gathering and the opening of various shops and other venues that we are now required to wear masks in shops, and advised to in other public spaces, especially indoors. I chatted to one of the store staff at Sainsbury's ( not advertising honestly) yesterday and she said she was worried because as staff they were going to have to tell people that they can't come in without a mask and was concerned about some responses.

Other news told us that the government are planning an extensive campaign to make flu vaccinations available to many more people, including the over 50's and some with health conditions that have been identified, for me that means I will be offered the flu vaccine for the first time!

I am also aware that in many of our churches risk assessments are taking place, and with them comes the realisation that things are going to be very different for a long time, I have even had some discussions on how we will have to do Christmas differently, which is not something I normally start considering in July, pointing again to the way the rhythms of life have changed so dramatically.

With all of this in mind, and things changing day by day, advice coming to us from multiple sources, sometimes confusing and sometimes seemingly conflicting perhaps we need to seek a quiet place for our souls to rest, and even in doing so to offer that rest to others. As I read the gospel passage set for this week those thoughts are highlighted for me, as Jesus invites us to have consider the wonder of a mustard seed, and to seek out the pearl of great price.

### ***Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-52***

#### ***The Parable of the Mustard Seed***

*He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; 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***

*He told them another parable: '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.'*

#### ***Three Parables***

*'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.'*

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

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

## *Treasures New and Old*

*'Have you understood all this?' They answered, 'Yes.' 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.*

Have you understood all of this, Jesus asks the disciples? Their answer is yes, so he tells them to go into their storehouses to consider both old and new treasures and to select the ones that will help them to connect with the kingdom of heaven at this time, remembering that Jesus teaches that the kingdom of heaven is with us in him, and that through him we can enter it. This is all about our relationship with God. We need to see in Jesus the one who would withdraw to pray, to seek out intimacy with his father and the fullness of the Spirit in order to carry out his ministry on earth, in Jesus the fullness of God dwells in power, and where power meets vulnerability.

As we walk through these days, I don't know about you, but there are certainly times when I have felt extremely vulnerable, times when I have wondered if this will ever end, or overwhelmed by all that needs doing, and feeling like I will never be able to do it all. Life can be overwhelming, Jesus knew that, he shared these parables in a particularly busy time of his ministry, the crowds were pressing in on him, the religious rulers were planning to silence him, and even his own family were concerned about him. It is into this background of turmoil and activity that Jesus tells us to seek the kingdom of God, to find the treasure within, and to know that the kingdom will come, indeed we can become a part of its coming to fulfilment as we seek it, for in seeking the kingdom, which at this time is both now, and not quite yet, we connection with the God who made us, the Son who walks with us, and the Holy Spirit who promises to fill us with peace and guide us on the way.

As I did last week, bearing in mind what you have just read, I offer you some questions:

- Have you found other worship experiences helpful in lockdown? What were they?
- Have felt connected and supported in this time?
- Have you been able to exercise a ministry to others? If so how? (phone calls, helping a neighbour, praying for the world and more?)
- Coming out of Lockdown is a unique opportunity to plan for different ways of being church. Can you think of what they could look like?

I recognise that the answers will be different for everyone and am available to listen, particularly if you feel you have not been supported, for which I can only apologise.

Finally, I leave you again with a hymn:

*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 outcasts 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.*

The Kingdom of God is emerging among us, let us be those who seek the fullness of that coming.

May God bless you and keep you, and once again don't hesitate to be in touch if you would like to talk.

Peace and blessings

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From my prayer walk last week, I like to get out into the hills to pray