



Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon by Revd Allie Joseph



Sunday 26 July 2020

READINGS

Genesis 29:1-28; Psalm 105:1-11 or 128; Romans 8:26-30; Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

The Kingdom of Heaven

This week Jesus continues teaching in parables. It was the saviour's favourite method of instruction. This week Jesus gives us very short teachings on his favourite topic: The kingdom of heaven.

He speaks to a people who living under the Roman Empire, one of the most oppressive ever. The oppression by the Romans and their Jewish enforcers are very real to the Jews listening to these parables. In this context Jesus tells them parables about what he calls the Kingdom of heaven. The parable of the mustard seed, a seed that Jesus calls one of the smallest seeds, that grows into a shrub that gives shelter to birds. Then Jesus speaks of leaven or yeast, buried treasure, a pearl of great prize and a net full of fish that does not break.

Let us acknowledge where this Sunday finds us, where we are and what we probably share at this time. We started the lockdown in March and a lot has happened since then. Our view of the world has changed and now that we are the epicentre of the pandemic here in South Africa we are called to a new perspective. Before we used to watch the rate of infections and deaths on the news, now we know people who tested positive or who are in isolation or quarantine or God forbid, we know people who passed on as a result of the virus.

We can identify with the people listening to Jesus talking about the kingdom of heaven as something so different from what we currently living. A kingdom filled with fear, apprehension, uncertainty, anxiety, loneliness, lack and loss to name but a few. It is apt that during this time we celebrate the birth of one of the world's favourite sons, Nelson Mandela who is hailed as a model of perseverance and the power of the human spirit to overcome. A son of the soil who believed that it always seems impossible until it is done.

In the Lord's prayer we pray, that your kingdom come. And as Jesus announces the kingdom, Jesus tells us that the kingdom of heaven calls into perspective all we value. A kingdom that starts at the end of our comfort zones. A kingdom that demands a new way of looking at things.

Like the mustard seed that is in the ground and growing, the leaven kneaded into the flour, the treasure buried, the pearl of great value found or the net drawn out the water, we are called to be filled with hope. The person who buries their treasure does so because they hope to come later and dig it up, the pearl is formed over time and with great effort, and the net stays in tact despite the pressure of all the fish.

Are we ready for the kingdom of God or do we come to that section of the prayer and close our eyes a little tighter and hope it does not come now? The Kingdom of God that comes in the hearts and the lives of Christians who live their baptism, who practice their faith in hope and charity.

Like the mustard seed our faith must grow exponentially, so that others may find shelter in us. Let us not always desire to be the biggest and the most important but learn to serve the cause of the Kingdom of heaven. Even in the little things, the menial tasks. Emptying ourselves of pride and self-importance, allowing ourselves to be used in this Kingdom of heaven.

Like the leaven we are compelled to change the world from within, to make it learn how to use the good of the world to feed the hungry and make the stranger welcome, reaching out to those who live in the shadow of death and bring hope to a world in the grip of anxiety and fear. Like the man who finds the hidden treasure let us be filled with joy at finding ourselves saved by Jesus Christ. The world needs Christian joy and optimism. You and I are called to spread the joy of the Kingdom of heaven.

Like both the merchant and the man who found the treasure may God allow us to readjust our priorities. The kingdom demands a new set of values. It calls into question the way we value things, others, and ourselves. This selling everything and buying that which we value most points to Jesus giving up everything for us out of love. What has our love of Jesus made us give up and let go of?

Then at last, the net that does not tear despite all the fish. The love of God is endless, the net will not tear despite all the pressure. In the end we will be judged by a God who is merciful and who has held us in special care of love. It is often more important to us how we judge others and how we see them. The time has come that we see each other as God sees us, as God loves us and as God saves us.

The question most important is posed again, "Have you understood all these things?"