

+ Crowe Hill + Fordingbridge + Horton Heath + Ringwood +

Sunday Service 26th July 2020

Welcome to this Sunday's Service

Lectionary Texts:

1 Kings 3:5–12 Psalm 119:129–136 Romans 8:26–39 Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52

Theme: 'What the kingdom of heaven is like'

Keeping in Touch

Dear Friends in all our churches.

Like you we are missing the opportunity to chat and have fellowship with each other at both worship and on more social occasions. Face to face conversations have been replaced by telephone calls. Please know we are happy to receive phone calls if you wish to chat. However with lockdown restrictions lifting and people feeling able to socialise more, please phone Louise if you would like a visit to your home or garden. The invitation to our manse garden continues to be open. We appreciate everyone has their own limitations of how much socialising they can do. We look forward to hearing from you. Please know we continue to pray for you and think about your individual circumstances.

Love and God Bless Louise and Mike (01425 473407)

Pray for the trustees of all the four churches as they continue to discuss and review preparations needed for use of the buildings.

FORDINGBRIDGE

The monthly Churches Together in Fordingbridge Prayer Link is attached. It has been prepared by New Life Community Church, Fordingbridge.

RINGWOOD

Pray for the nieces, Kairen, Francesca and Rosamunde, nieces of Margaret Vaughn-Jones following her death. Her funeral was on Friday 24th July. Margaret has been supported for a long time in a local care home and valued worship services led there by Trinity United Church. She was a member at Ringwood Methodist Church (and then Trinity United Church) and prior to that Verwood Methodist Church.

Pat Daniels is recovering in Poole hospital following a fall and subsequent operation for a broken hip. Pray for David and all the family.

As John Birch retires from his role as Trinity Centre Manager after 12 years of dedicated service, we pray for him as he takes time to enjoy his family.

HORTON HEATH

Continue to pray for John and Janet and their families. John is being nursed at home with the support of Janet and the Macmillan Nurse team.

CROWE

Continue to pray for John and Deidre. Deidre is now in a palliative care stage for her cancer. Pray for the whole family, their three children David, Catherine and Bronwen and grandchildren, as they take time to be together. Please pray for Bronwen who lives in New Zealand experiencing difficulties of travel due to Covid 19 restrictions.

Call to Worship

Let all the earth acclaim God

Sing to the glory of his name. Psalm 66:1

Hymn 'Thine be the glory' (STF 313, R+S 247, SOF 1/551)

A lockdown version, with a great piano introduction!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTXUsKFecJs>

1. Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won;
angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,
kept the folded grave-clothes where thy body lay:

Chorus

*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.*

2. Lo, Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;
lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom;
let the Church with gladness hymns of triumph sing,
for her Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting:

3. No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of Life;
life is naught without thee: aid us in our strife;
make us more than conquerors through thy deathless love;

bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above:

Words: Edmond Budry (1854-1932)

Prayer

'For I am convinced that neither death, nor life ... nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.' (Romans 8:38-39)

God of heaven and earth, in these times of isolation,
apart from loved ones
distant from friends
away from neighbours
thank you that there is nothing in all of creation,
not even coronavirus,
that is able to separate us from your love.

And may your love that never fails continue to be shared
through the kindness of strangers looking out for each other,
for neighbours near and far all recognising our shared vulnerability,
each of us grateful for every breath,
and willing everyone to know the gift of a full and healthy life.
Keep us all in your care. **Amen.**

Hymn: 'The kingdom of God is justice and joy' (STF255, R+S200)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vqCOggQhFyo>

1. 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.

2. The kingdom of God
is mercy and grace,
the prisoners are freed,
the sinners find place,
the outcast are welcomed
God's banquet to share,
and hope is awakened

in place of despair.

3. 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.

4. 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.

Words: Bryn A. Rees (1911-83)

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Prayer for Illumination

We thank you, God, that we are never left alone.
We live confident that you will lead us on the journey of faith.
So we ask that you speak to us now:
Holy Spirit, open our minds and our souls to the truth.
Move us with your word
that we may listen with ears of hope,
learn with hearts of faith
and live in your world with love. **Amen**

Bible Reading: Romans 8:26-39 (ESV)

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. ²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?
³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?
³⁶ As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Video

I commend a lovely recent video from Hope UK. It is all about 'Hope' and concludes with some of the verses from today's Bible reading from the letter to the Romans. It is 8 minutes long, but very beautifully done and encouraging.

<https://vimeo.com/438538061>



Bible Reading: Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52 (ESV)

The Mustard Seed and the Leaven

³¹ He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. ³² It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

³³ He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

⁴⁴ “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Value

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

The Parable of the Net

⁴⁷ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. ⁴⁸ When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

New and Old Treasures

⁵¹ “Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.” ⁵² And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

Sermon: ‘What is the kingdom of heaven like?’

Introduction – Romans 8

The lectionary has been leading us through a series of readings from Paul’s letter to the Romans. Today we read wonderful words about God’s love for the world he created, revealed in Christ Jesus. This is an all-conquering love, an irresistible love, an all-embracing love. God’s purpose and plan is achieved through the power of love.

Jesus and his parables of the kingdom

Jesus taught in parables (vs. 34), stories which stand in parallel and contrast to the ways of the world, and reveal the kingdom of God as opposed to the kingdoms of

this world. Two things to say about parables in general, firstly, they are meant to tease at your brain, to get you thinking, there is always a bit of a riddle about them, if you think a parable is easy to understand then you have probably missed Jesus' point! Secondly, in Matthew's gospel Jesus says that they are parables about the 'kingdom of heaven', but in the other gospels Jesus calls them parables about the 'kingdom of God'. This change from 'God' to 'heaven' is probably because Matthew wrote his gospel for a more Jewish audience, Jews didn't like to use the name of God or the word 'God' unnecessarily, 'God' was too holy for common usage. So Matthew is cautious and polite because of his concern for his audience. He uses culturally appropriate language to share his gospel. Good for Matthew. So what does that tell us about Jesus? Jesus didn't care! He told his parables about the kingdom of God and probably enjoyed watching his audience wince a bit every time he said the word 'God' (flinch). The parables of Jesus stick it in to you with a bit of cut-and-thrust. "Whoever has ears let them hear." (vs. 9 and 43)

Chapter 13 is a long chapter which includes a gathering of eight parables. The first two are longer stories and come with a bit of commentary or explanation, and we have looked at them in previous weeks. Today we look at the last six short parables. In fact the last one is so short not everyone agrees that it is a parable. Short parables are more problematic than long parables. Long parables give the listener more chance to understand and unpack the meaning, especially if Jesus offers his own commentary on the parable. But short parables come and go in a sentence or two, and it is easy to miss the point, to think they are simple, and fail to spot the challenge Jesus issues. Let's look at them one-by-one.

The parable of the mustard seed – The mustard seed is very small, but also the plant it grows into is a bit of a weed, a thug of the allotment or garden or small field. The Jewish Rabbis instructed that if you grew mustard you should grow it outside your garden. And it doesn't really grow into a tree, it grows into a wiry bush. So Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven can begin like a tiny seed, sown almost invisibly, that not everyone will appreciate it, and that it will grow amazingly bigger than people would expect.

The parable of the yeast (or leaven) – Is very similar to the previous parable in meaning. We bake risen bread by mixing a small amount of yeast, or leaven, or a sour-dough starter, into the flour and water, allowing the yeast to produce carbon dioxide bubbles so that the dough will rise before we bake it. Delicious. But why is the woman 'hiding' the yeast in the flour? Some translations say 'mixing' but is that simplifying the challenge of Jesus' words? You can't hide yeast in the flour Jesus! Doesn't that woman know what will eventually happen? And what an amazing amount of flour or dough Jesus is talking about, 'three measures', or 30kg or 66lb by modern estimates. Using primitive hand techniques you wouldn't try to handle that much dough in one batch. Again Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven can begin in a small and hidden way, but the result will be amazing.

The parable of the hidden treasure and The parable of the precious pearl – I think these two parables make a matched pair. In order to acquire something of great value the purchaser has to give up everything they formerly owned in order to acquire this new treasure. They make the ultimate sacrifice, they gamble everything on one apparently small but expensive purchase. The hidden treasure or the precious pearl will change everything in a big way. Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven is a change of life which is worth everything for the disciple who hears and obeys. Leave behind your former life in the kingdoms of the world and enter a new life in the kingdom of God. Do you see the attractiveness of his kingdom? Can you see that it is worth it?

The parable of the net – This parable makes a good pair with the parable of the weeds and the wheat. Both parables conclude with the 'end of the age'. They both are parables of two halves. Are both halves the 'kingdom of heaven'? Or is only the first half, or the last half, about the 'kingdom of heaven'? I think it is a mistake to believe that the 'kingdom of heaven' or the 'kingdom of God' is only about paradise, or life after resurrection, or life in some spiritual abode which we sometimes call 'heaven', which we encounter at the end of the age. I think the whole parable is about 'the kingdom of heaven' both what happens at the end of the age, and what is happening right now, either in the field with the wheat and weeds, or in the lake with the fish swimming about. At the harvest of the crop there will be sorting. At the hauling in of the net there will be sorting. But before that in the kingdom the wheat and the weeds grow side-by-side, and all sorts of fish swim side-by-side. Jesus says that in the kingdom there should be love, toleration, and patience. There is a clear and terrible warning of what might happen at the end of the age. But if we all hear and heed the warning in these parables, then the kingdom will turn out to be fuller than we might expect.

The parable of the storeroom – Not everyone agrees that this is a proper parable. And it contains a problem verb. Does the householder 'bring out' of his storeroom things old and new? Nearly all Bibles translate the word this way. It sounds sensible and organised and thoughtful. I have said before that it reminds me of the way in which most of us have a cupboard or boxes of ornaments and knickknacks, old and new, and when we redecorate the living room we may choose a fresh selection of items to display on the mantelpiece, and one might be a family heirloom, and one might be a brand new souvenir from our latest holiday, but all carefully chosen, 'curated' people sometimes say, to say something about us and our memories and life experiences. But actually the verb is a bit more active and violent than that, it is usually translated as 'thrown out' or 'expelled', it's the same word root used for the weeds (v.42), the net (v.47) and the fish (v. 50). Perhaps a more vivid translation into English would help. Jesus says that the teacher of law, or Scribe, should be willing to throw out everything that they previously treasured, whether it is old or new learning, it all needs to go, so that the teacher can learn all new stuff about the workings of the kingdom of heaven in our world today. Only a radical re-framing of the mind will equip a disciple to understand and enter the kingdom.

Conclusion

“Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked. “Yes,” they replied. (vs 51) And do we believe them? No, not really. And have we understood all of Jesus’ parables? No, probably not. But I hope and pray that we are all challenged, and want to discover and enter the kingdom which is hidden all around us in small and mysterious ways, ready to be uncovered, to grow, and to burst into amazing life if only we are ready and willing to pay the price to join in the growth as disciples of the kingdom.

Song

As we think about these short ‘kingdom of heaven’ parables, my thoughts return to the words of the Lord’s Prayer and the ‘Thy Kingdom Come’ prayer campaign from earlier in the year. Here is a great new song performed by Pete James. (This is the ‘post-coronavirus’ version, with videos of our Father’s kingdom in action in lives of loving service.) There are lots of other lovely resources on the Thy Kingdom Come website and YouTube site and Facebook page.

<https://youtu.be/68FXLLGHEdE>

1. Thy Kingdom Come – Lord teach us how to pray
For all to know your joy, your peace and love
And know your friendship each and every day
The breath of Christ, the Father’s gentle dove

2. Thy Kingdom Come – Christ’s prayer to make us one
That all may know the Father sent the Son
To celebrate the victory He has won
In love and grace we pray: ‘thy will be done’

3. Thy Kingdom Come – we pray for those we know
To turn and follow you for all their days
and in your love find peace and service grow
Our one desire and hope your highest praise

4. Thy Kingdom Come – transform our human ways
Our lives laid down in mercy, truth and care
Nations renewed, in giving thanks and praise
To see God’s Kingdom come: this is our prayer

5. Thy Kingdom Come – we praise your Holy name
Your sacrifice and rising sets us free

That by our words and lives we may proclaim

By Jesus' risen life, God's victory!

Words: Neil Hamilton Thompson, Chris Russell, Emma Buchan, Harvey Jessop

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Taize chant: 'The kingdom of God is justice and peace'

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WL1_IhVTJmk

The Kingdom of God is justice and peace

And joy in the Holy Spirit.

Come Lord and open in us

The gates of your kingdom.

Words: Taize

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Prayers in a time of coronavirus

Love never fails

Even in the darkest moments, love gives hope.

Love compels us to fight against coronavirus alongside our sisters and brothers living in poverty.

Love compels us to stand together in prayer with our neighbours near and far.

Love compels us to give and act as one.

Now, it is clear that our futures are bound together more tightly than ever before.

As we pray in our individual homes – around the nation and around the world – we are united as one family.

So, let us pause and find a moment of peace ... and we lift up our hearts together in prayer:

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession

For the health workers tending the seriously ill

for the scientists working on a vaccination

for the researchers analysing data and identifying trends

for the media outlets working to communicate reality

for the supermarket workers, hygiene and sanitation providers

for the good news stories of recoveries and effective planning

for the recognition that isolation doesn't need to mean loneliness

for the notes through letterboxes offering help and support

for the internet and telephones and technology that connects

for the awakened appreciation of what is truly important

Thanks be to God.

For those who are unwell and concerned for loved ones

for those who were already very anxious

for those immune-suppressed or compromised
for those vulnerable because of underlying conditions
for those in the 'most at risk to coronavirus' categories
for those watching their entire income stream dry up
for those who have no choice but to go out to work
for those who are afraid to be at home
for those who are more lonely than they've ever been
for those who are bereaved and grieving.

God be their healer, comfort and protection,
be their strength, shield and provision
be their security, safety and close companion

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

And raise up your people, your Church
to be your well-washed hands and faithful feet
to be present to the pain
to respond with love in action
if even from a safe distance.

We offer you our church leaders,
our Minister, Elders, Stewards, Executive Council members
Be with them and bless them

as they seek to guide our churches through a socially distanced world

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen

Offering and Dedication

We remember charities, churches, and struggling people. May God's Spirit prompt us to discover what help we can offer to those in difficulty.

Lord, as you have blessed us, help us to thankfully receive, and to generously share, in your name and to your glory. Amen

Song: 'Sent by the Lord am I' (STF 239)

Another lockdown virtual choir to send us on our way.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRGy2XNJnQ>

1. Sent by the Lord am I;
my hands are ready now
to make the earth the place
in which the kingdom comes.
Sent by the Lord am I;
my hands are ready now
to make the earth the place

in which the kingdom comes.

2. The angels cannot change
a world of hurt and pain
into a world of love,
of justice and of peace.
The task is mine to do,
to set it really free.
Oh, help me to obey;
help me to do your will.

Words: Jose Aguiar

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Dismissal and Blessing

Your life lies hidden with Christ in God.

May you come to the full wealth of conviction which understanding brings,

And grasp God's secret, which is Christ himself,

In whom lie hidden

All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

And the blessing of God almighty

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Be with you all. **Amen.**