# Sunday 26th July

Let us pray.

Teach me Your ways, Lord, that I may come down from my heights and be open to the same Spirit who moved over the face of the waters in the first day of creation and moves also over the chaos of this time to fashion a day like this, a world like ours, a life like mine, a kingdom acting as leaven in the bread of earth. Make me aware of the miracles of life, of warm and cold, of starkness and order, of screaming wind and impenetrable silences, and of the unfathomable mystery of amazing grace in which I am kept.

Teach me Your ways, Lord, that I may praise You for all the surprising, ingenious ways You bless me, and for all the wondrous gifts You give me, along with all the pain and joy I sustain.

Teach me Your ways, Lord, that I may accept my own talent openly, nurture it hopefully, develop it faithfully, and give it freely.

Teach me Your ways, Lord, that I may love Your kindness and practice it toward the hungry of the world, the poor and sick, and oppressed, that I may learn the healing humility that comes from You.

Teach me Your ways, Lord, so that my heart is flooded with Your mercy—emptying it of what makes it firmly opposed to Your ways, so that it beats more in rhythm with You and pounds greatly for Your kingdom. Amen.

**STF 255**

 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!

Bryn Rees (1911–1983)

**Matthew13:31-33, 44-52**

**Sermon**

If you haven’t quite picked up the theme, these parables are talking about the kingdom of heaven. I feel tempted to echo the question that Jesus put to the disciples in verse 51- ‘*Have you understood all this?’* If the answer is *yes*, then I’ll hand over the sermon to you!

Even though these parables are very short, there is a lot to think about within them. Firstly, we encounter the images of a mustard seed and then yeast. Two things that are living, given the right conditions, can grow! They are seem to tie in nicely with the parables that surround them, the sower and the wheat and weeds. They are images that could be easily understood by anyone at that time. To see something so small create something so much bigger than itself, for me is a reminder of how significant the smallest action of love can be. Yet when Jesus says things in parables, its not always the things that are obvious that are Jesus wants us to hear. Seeing growth is the dream of most churches, to be able to provide shade for animals in a world where trees are greatly needed, seems idyllic. But. It takes time for shrubs to grow and yeast to prove. Providing shade for birds, suggests that in our growing, others will use us, rest on us, leaves scares and make mess, they are not even the same species as us. In a similar way as the yeast grows, it is then mixed with other ingredients, flour, salt, oil etc. Together they can create a beautiful loaf of bread, but in making that, the air that the yeast has help create, will be knocked out of it time after time, until it is ready to be cooked and the yeast is killed off. And this is what the kingdom of heaven is like.

Jesus then compares the kingdom of heaven to items, firstly treasure hidden in a field, then a pearl of great value and finally a net full of every kind of fish. It seems there is no one image that fits the kingdom of heaven.

The person who finds treasure in a field and sells everything to get that field, is putting themselves in risk of having no where to sleep when it rains. Jesus doesn’t indicate if the treasure is gold, but it is worth enough to that person, to let everything go, to be able to be the owner of whatever is hidden. Similarly, the person who is looking for pearls, is on the hunt for something of great value and when they find it, again, they sell everything just for that one pearl. Neither of these appear to sell the item to make themselves richer or to get back what they have given away, they now seem prepared to live a life that has very little possessions and yet they are content. This is what the kingdom of heaven like.

The final parable that Jesus uses is the net full of fish- just to keep the fishermen happy! When the net is full, they go ashore and keep the good fish and throw out the bad. Personally, I think this is the hardest of the lot, as it challenges the idea that everyone in the net is meant to be there. We don’t like the idea that those who have been sharing in our traditions and have been faithfully attending our churches might not make the cut. There are echoes here of the parable of the wheat and the weeds, that those who are just trying to blend in will be spotted and thrown out. It is scary to think that we might not make it and this is what the kingdom of heaven is like.

Jesus is trying to describe to them what the kingdom of heaven is like and as with all parables, there are plenty of ways of reading them. In the very last piece Jesus says that those who are trained must bring out the old and the new. As he is mentioning the scribes, we can get the idea that Jesus might be referring to the law, that those who have said yes they understand, are trained in the new and old laws, both of which are needed when understanding the kingdom of heaven.

At this turning point for our churches we too need to be bringing out the old treasures alongside the new. The lessons that are learnt from the past and the new things that are worth holding on to. The things that have grown and brought us to this point and those things that others think are complete madness.

It is our turn now to answer yes, to use what we know and step forward into what we don’t, holding the treasures of the past and the treasures we have newly gained to become the next parable that says the kingdom of heaven is like The Church, living, growing, full of great value and worth, drawing all together for God.

**STF 706**

1 Longing for light, we wait in darkness. Longing for truth, we turn to you. Make us your own, your holy people, light for the world to see.
 *Christ, be our light!
 Shine in our hearts.
 Shine through the darkness.
 Christ, be our light!
Shine in your Church gathered today.*

2 Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.

3 Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others, shared until all are fed.

 4 Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone.

 5 Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.

Bernadette Farrell (*b.*1957)

**Intercessions**

Lord, we give you thanks for the word that you hide like a treasure in our heart, for the leaven which is able to penetrate to every area of our life - for the seed that is able to grow into a mighty plant. Help us to value that which you have given us - to make following Christ the most important thing in our daily lives - to concentrate above all upon doing your will and sharing your love and the good news you have proclaimed through Jesus with one another and with the world.

We give you thanks for the wonders of our heritage and for the new things that you continue to do in our midst. We praise you for the teachings of the prophets, for the law you revealed unto Moses, for the grace and the love that you poured out and continue to pour out through Christ - and for the guidance, the strength, the wisdom, the peace, the joy, the patience, and the gentleness that you bestow upon us through your Spirit. Help us to value both the old and the new and to become worthy teachers of the lessons of your eternal kingdom.

We pray for the people around us this day - for those who are upon our hearts and minds…

A TIME OF QUIET

We ask you to hear all our prayers, O God, in the name of the one who taught us to pray… OUR FATHER....

**Blessing**

Go now secure in the love of God from which nothing can separate you. Delight in seeking the Lord -look always for the power and the presence of God, and let love, like yeast in dough, permeate all you do. And may God work for good in all things for you; May Christ Jesus conform you in the image of his love; And may the Holy Spirit help you in your weakness, interceding for you, and in you, according to the will of God.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
   ***In the name of Christ. Amen.***

26th July Walk

**May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
   be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.**

On your walk today,

* What old things and new things can you see?
* What makes something old?
* How would you define something that is new?
* Can something new also be old?

**Read Matthew 13:51-52**

**51**“Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.” **52**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.”

This piece of scripture follows a whole chapter in Matthew, of parables, some of which have explanations, others which are shorter, almost statements without a big story line. The parables that we find in Matthew 13, all seem to be themed around the idea of what the kingdom of heaven is like and now Jesus is asking the disciples whether they understand. In a way Jesus is calling his disciples, scribes- those who have been taught and thereby have themselves become teachers through their understanding. It is the disciples who must now teach what they have learnt. Jesus talks about the new and the old, possibly referring to the way people used to understand their relationship to God and now how through Jesus it has changed and developed.

* Are there things from your past that are particularly important to your faith?
* What would it be like to lose them?
* During times of change we find new or different ways of being, are there any new changes that you would like to keep?
* Can you think of examples of when new and old are able to work together?

Jesus gave to his disciples a new commandment, that we love one another as God has loved us. We are invited into a relationship with God, who is of the old and the new.

As you walk, think about the words of this old hymn- can you see anything new?

One more step along the world I go, one more step along the world I go; from the old things to the new
keep me travelling along with you:
*and it's from the old I travel to the new; keep me travelling along with you.*

Round the corners of the world I turn, more and more about the world I learn; all the new things that I see you'll be looking at along with me:

As I travel through the bad and good, keep me travelling the way I should; where I see no way to go you'll be telling me the way, I know:

Give me courage when the world is rough, keep me loving though the world is tough;
leap and sing in all I do, keep me travelling along with you:

You are older than the world can be, you are younger than the life in me; ever old and ever new, keep me travelling along with you:

**Activity:**

**Have a look around your house, do you have any old things that you could make into something new?**

**What sort of thing would you make?**

* **Something pretty?**
* **Something useful?**
* **Something from your imagination?**

**If you feel you are able, see if you can make it- I would love to see any creations- this is not a competition!**