

The Kingdom of God is Like Corona Virus... please bear with me!

Our gospel portion for this week is a series of parables describing the kingdom of God. They describe something which is too small to be seen but can utterly transform the world around it. I wonder if this sounds familiar? However, unlike the Corona Virus the Kingdom of God is something we want to see take root and grow in the world around us and something we should be actively encouraging.

Since the beginning of this year the influence of COVID-19 has grown, invading, and causing untold damage on our world. It has been transforming, changing aspects of our lives we had not even considered could be changed. It has for many reshaped and reformed our values and what we see as important. It has changed our relationships with those around us and forced real and lasting change on how we go about our daily lives. It has affected everyone from the wealthy to the poor, yet things like race, and wealth have shaped how we understand it. COVID-19 is a huge, ever present and consistently real present in our lives and yet it is still an often invisible, subtle, and misunderstood.

The kingdom of God grows like a mustard seed beginning tiny and small yet becoming huge and strong. It is like yeast in bread flour which leavens the whole batch, it is pervasive, and it transforms. It changes something from one state to another. The Kingdom of God reshapes priorities giving a man a reason to sell everything he owns and buy a field in order to possess such a treasure. It impacts everyone just as all fish are caught in a net, but it does not make the same impact on everyone just as some fish are cast away.

This group of parables are some of the more straight forward in the gospels. We know that the parables of the mustard seed and yeast explore characteristics of the Kingdom of God to do with growth, size, and impact. It does not matter how big the seed or the yeast grains they impact is still huge and transformative. The glimmers we see in the world around us, of God's Kingdom breaking through, they can affect real and significant change no matter how insignificant and small they seem to be. For a mustard seed to grow in a full-sized tree just as for yeast to leaven a whole loaf it needs the right conditions. We need to provide the Kingdom of God with the opportunities to take root in, and to be mixed through-out our world. We are currently taking steps to stop the spread the current pandemic... can we also take steps to encourage the growth of God's Kingdom.

Not only is the Kingdom of God capable of bringing about change in the world but it also brings about a change in us: in our hearts, minds, and perspectives. The parables of the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price are about discovering something more than anything else. In both cases the men who have discovered their treasure go and sell all that they own to possess it. They sell ALL THAT THEY OWN. You must assume that they are left, homeless, without food or clothing. They were willing to utterly change their lives, to redistribute the wealth accumulated over a lifetime... I wonder if any of you like myself and my husband have discovered that our priorities are different now than they were in 2019. I would now prioritise the chance to walk on the beach and put my feet in the sea over new clothes, technology etc. experiences that we can share as a family, time with friends... it all seems rather more precious to us now. The Kingdom of God shapes our perspectives too. One of the great realisations of my life came after I became a Christian is that my world 'success' and 'renown' meant so very little to me because they were now unimportant in comparison with knowing God and understanding his desire for justice, equity and love....

For each of us the pandemic has hit us in different ways. For those in the world who are living in poverty or face unfair and unjust opportunities to keep safe or get treatment it has been much harder. For those of us who face injustice, prejudice, and persecution on a daily basis the Kingdom of God which brings, justice, equity, peace and love means a radically change. For those of us who are fortunate to see those things in our lives we can rejoice to know the Kingdom of God is near to us. These parables span a range of roles and genders, farmers, women, rich men, fishermen, scribes... they also span a range of activities. The Kingdom of God is for and about everyone and about our day to day lives. It is not, like corona virus something that is mostly happening to other people (however we have been fortunate to avoid being ill ourselves). It is a reality to be searched, for invested in and encouraged to grow. We spend our days now planning how to keep ourselves and others safe, we make shopping trips for friends and neighbours, or have those around us care for us. We wash our hands, we pray, and we hope. We want to see our world changed when Corona is defeated. I'd like to encourage you to also seek out justice, peace, love, joy, equity, and hope. All the things we know are part of the Kingdom of God. To act to stop the spread of injustice, pain, hate, sadness, prejudice, and despair. To do for those around you all you can. To nurture and tend the seeds and glimmers that see so that it might spread to truly impact our world.

The Kingdom of God is NOT like Corona Virus as it truly good, wholly wonderful and utterly accessible to us all and something we should be actively seeking to grow and encourage.