

Morning Service for Beckminster via Zoom Sunday, 26 July 2020

Seeking and Finding

Call to Worship

Let the door of our heart be open to receive, O Christ; the soul of our being unlocked to welcome you; and the gate of our life flung wide for your entering in. **Amen.**

(Ambrose of Milan c. 340-397)

Prayers of Praise and Thanksgiving

Creator and Eternal God, your breath brings life to all creation; you are our constant in love and understanding; you know us as no-one else does and are concerned with our thoughts and words and deeds. With all creation we praise you. We would have never understood you if you hadn't sent your Son, that through his life and love, we glimpsed the essence of who you are. We thank you for the revelation of yourself through him and for the understanding of your kingdom – the Kingdom of God here on earth.

We thank you too that through this difficult time that you have been our constant companion, that we have seen you in the love and caring and compassion of others — in our families and our friends and all those unknown to us who have worked tirelessly to keep us safe. And we continue in praise as we sing/say

StF 102 For the beauty of the earth

For the beauty of the earth
For the beauty of the skies
For the love that from our birth
Over and around us lies
*Gracious God, to you we raise
This our sacrifice of praise*

For the beauty of each hour
Of the day and of the night
Hill and vale and tree and flower,
Sun and moon and stars of light
*Gracious God, to you we raise
This our sacrifice of praise*

For the joy of human love,
Brother, sister, parent child,
Friends on earth, and friends above,
Pleasures pure and undefiled:
*Gracious God, to you we raise
This our sacrifice of praise*

For each perfect gift and sign
Of your love so freely given
Graces human and divine,
Flowers of earth and buds of heaven;
*Gracious God, to you we raise
This our sacrifice of praise.*

Folliott Sandford Pierpoint (1835-1917)

Old Testament Reading: 1 Kings 3: 5 - 9

Solomon's Prayer for Wisdom

5. At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask what I should give you.' 6. And Solomon said 'You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart towards you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today.

7. And now, O Lord my God you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. 8. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. 9. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?'

Gospel Reading Matthew 13: 31 - 33, 44 - 45

Parables of the Kingdom

31. He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; 32. It is the smallest of all seeds but when it has grown it is the greatest of all shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make their nests in its branches.'

33. He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast which a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened'

44. 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.'

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

The stories Jesus told

I love stories with meaning that allows me to understand better the world that we live in, or help me to understand what it is that is expected of me in life using other people's life stories as illustration of good and bad. I have dipped into many books during this recent period but only a few have I read cover to cover. But one book that has really appealed to me is a very easy but delightful read—'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse' by Charlie Mackesy. It is the story of unlikely friendships celebrating kindness, compassion and understanding in some very simple words. 'What do we do when our hearts hurt?' says the boy. 'We wrap them with friendship, shared tears and time, till they wake hopeful and happy again' says the horse.

If you have a chance, do read it because it is a gem.

Jesus loved telling stories particularly when he was trying to explain difficult concepts such as the kingdom of heaven and they weren't long stories. Jesus parables in Matthew all begin — 'the kingdom of Heaven is like...' but Matthew is the only gospel that refers to the Kingdom of Heaven, the other gospel writers speak of the Kingdom of God. So is there a difference? For the Jews the kingdom of heaven was something that would be in the future, something that they are still waiting for. And Matthew was writing for the Jews. But the kingdom of God referred to in the other Gospels is the realm where God exists in complete authority, full of righteousness and holiness and where his rule is acknowledged in the hearts of the believers. God is everywhere but heaven is not. Jesus brought with him a little of the Kingdom of God but only a few recognised this. For some the kingdom descriptors are interchangeable but in reality they are not.

Jesus describes this difficult concept of kingdom in the things that the people would understand in their everyday experience.

The kingdom of heaven is not presented on a plate but requires searching for in our hearts and minds and then requires looking after and embodying in our lives. It is no good burying the treasure of the kingdom again in another part of the field, the pearl is of no use if it is hidden away and not on display; (pearls in Jesus day were more valuable than gold — they were so pleasing to look at). The yeast in our lives should make all the difference to the way we live.

The hidden treasure is God's presence within us. It begins in the reality of a personal relationship with him. For some it comes unexpectedly when our spade hits the treasure in early life, an unexpected moment of grace; for others it is the result of searching over many years. The parables also tell us that in order to find the kingdom we may need to give up somethings in order to acquire the treasure.

But treasure is really only treasure when it is revealed. Wisdom and knowledge have to be put to good use. Solomon asked for discernment. Discernment is the ability to see God's presence in all aspects of life, in right decision making, relying on his strength when ours has failed, --- in other words when we acknowledge that the kingdom of God is within us now we are changed people.

A discerning heart believes that God in Jesus gave himself unconditionally for us and unconditionally loves us. Solomon acknowledged that he was but a little child and it is as a child we need to accept God's love and cherish that love as one cherishes treasure and not let it decay or become tarnished. There is an unqualified risk in believing and we should not play down the demands that it makes on our lives.

Some parables were almost subversive like the grain of mustard seed. Everyone thinks that this is about a small seed growing into something much bigger — the seed of the gospel growing like Topsy; but at the time of Jesus, mustard trees were despised as a voracious weeds begging the question as to whether we could be too impressed by size,

success and strength — not valuing the small, the few, the signs of the kingdom that continue to shine through even when large gatherings are not possible, when we can't worship together in church. Are we too hung up on numbers? All over the world small groups of Christians have continued to meet in homes or on line, in the park. This is where we will find God; this is where his kingdom is growing.

We are able find other treasure too in those we meet, in their example, kindness and love and this has been especially seen in the last few months where help has been shown in the least expected places. Treasures, too, have been found in our reading about others in newspapers and books. Just like the boy found a new confidence in himself and his future when he met his unlikely friends particularly the horse who was so wise and taught the boy to love himself as well as others.

But there is only one great treasure — one great pearl, one hoard of treasure and as Tom Wright says the parables in this reading are a challenge to us at two levels — understanding and action. Understanding without action is sterile; action without understanding is exhausting and futile. Our thinking, our speaking and our living need to be rooted in the treasure but bearing fruit for the kingdom too.

The Epistle for today comes from Romans 8 and is a real descriptor of the pearl. Paul is adamant — nothing can separate us from the love of God. Nothing.

'For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 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'

This is our treasure!

Prayers for forgiveness

Gracious God, in the call to be your disciples we hear your call to the fullness of life, marked by love for you first and foremost and care for our neighbours, where true community crosses every barrier.

Forgive us for the times when we have tarnished our treasure, when we have been prepared to accept second best for others, and allowed divisions and inequality to separate people from one another and from you. When we discriminate between those we want to be friends with and those we don't because of their social status, their looks, their unruly children, their drug habits or nicotine stained fingers.

Among the many voices that call for our attention, help us to discern what is life giving, and give us courage and determination to take up your way of life. Help us to see you in every person we meet and to constantly re-find our treasure in your presence in our lives.

Amen.

StF 399 When deep despair

When deep despair casts out all light
And hope is wearing thin
Come Spirit dance with gentle grace,
Shine through the dullness we embrace
And make the colours sing;
And make the colours sing.

When greed dictates that children die
And poverty holds sway;
Come Spirit, burn as living flame,
Prompt us to act to end this shame;
Cast apathy away;
Cast apathy away.

When colour, lifestyle, creed or name
Cause groundless hate and fear;
Come Spirit, weave a web of peace,
That prejudice and violence cease;
Reveal God's purpose here;
Reveal God's purpose here.

When guilt and fear tear us apart
And faith's a bitter thing;
Come Spirit, dance with gentle grace,
Shine through the dullness we embrace
And make God's colour sing;
And make God's colour sing.

Michaela Youngson

The Offertory**Prayers for Others and Ourselves**

God of wisdom, as your prophets of old saw unlimited possibilities and called people to faithful living grant us the vision needed to change the world.

Where the voices of greed drown out the voices of the needy
Where children die from malnutrition
Where countries are devastated by Corona virus and locusts
Grant us the wisdom and courage to help make a difference

Where shouts of despair drown out the whispers of the hopeful, where peace seems to be an unobtainable dream,
Where well being is measured in how much we own,
Grant us the wisdom and courage to help make a difference

Where the laughter of the arrogant drown out the whispers of the broken hearted,
Where depressed people only find stigma and rejection,
Where refugees are unwelcome and uncared for

Grant us the wisdom and courage to help make a difference

Where the alleluias of the self-righteous drowns out the prayers of the faithful
Where churches are dying from lack of vision,
Where people of faith distrust each other
Grant us the wisdom and courage to help make a difference

And ----- in silence let us lift to God those people and places that are in our hearts who
need our special prayers -----

Hear all our prayers shouted whispered or unspoken through Jesus Christ our Saviour and
Lord.

After Michaela Youngson

The Lord's Prayer

StF 504 May the mind

May the mind of Christ my Saviour
Live in me from day to day,
By his love and power controlling
all I do or say.

May I run the race before me,
Strong and brave to face the foe,
Looking only unto Jesus
As I onward go.

Katie Barclay Wilkinson (1859-1928)

Blessing

The Lord bless you and Keep you
The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you
The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you
and give you peace

Amen.

Aaronic blessing from Numbers 6: 24-26

The Grace