

Sunday 19th July 2020 –Sixth Sunday after Trinity.

Gospel Reading – Mathew 13: 24-43.

Gospel Reflection: The Kingdom of Heaven.

In the thirteenth Chapter of his Gospel, Matthew gives six short parables which give us six short glimpses into what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. Three of these occur within the gospel set for this morning. This morning's gospel follows directly on from the parable of the Sower (or rather its explanation). But before going any further, it's important to clarify just what the Kingdom of Heaven is. Is it the same as heaven or is it something different? In a spare moment, I'm sure that many of us may have wondered what Heaven might be like. But what about the Kingdom of Heaven? In the Bible, the phrase 'the Kingdom of Heaven' seems to be used synonymously with 'the Kingdom of God'. It seems to represent the Kingly rule or sovereignty of God rather than the environment in which God's rule operates. But of course, that rule will find its most perfect expression in heaven itself. But that is not the only place that it can be glimpsed. We can also experience God's kingly rule in the here and now. So what Jesus gives us in each of these Kingdom of Heaven parables are hints as to how we can enter into godly living in the here and now.

At first sight, all six of these examples seem to present a real hotchpotch of ideas ranging from the Kingdom of Heaven being like :a wheat field full of weeds that needs some serious weeding, a mustard seed, flour transformed by yeast, buried treasure, searching for fine pearls, right through to a net full of fish. You'll be glad to hear that our gospel reading this morning focusses on just the first three.

The first of these parables pulls no punches. As Jesus's explanation makes clear, it is about nothing less than judgement, not the kind of judgement that results in a verbal warning, but the Last Judgement that will take place at the end of time. Despite being a God of love, who created the world out of a desire to share that love with all creation, there is recognition that evil is present in the world through humanity freely choosing to pervert that which is good. The loving response is not to put up with it, for that way lies appeasement and surrender. No, the loving response is to challenge it, to root it out, for that way lies deliverance and 'the peace which passeth all understanding'. If we are seeking to mould our lives on God's Kingly Rule in the here and now, those who commit evil acts (which we must recognise can at times be ourselves) must be given every supported opportunity to turn their lives around so that they may respect themselves enough to believe themselves capable of loving their fellow members of the world community of which they themselves are a part, and to discover the loving God who called them into being in the first place.

Having been forewarned of the reality that is The Last Judgement, the second Kingdom of Heaven Parable offers us hope. No sincerely held faith, kind word or kind action is so small that it is incapable of transformative growth. And the third of the Kingdom of Heaven parables makes clear, that the catalyst for that transformation is the Spirit of Christ in the form of God's Holy Spirit working within and amongst each one of us.

Canon Gregory Clifton-Smith