

## Matthew 13: 44-53

There have recently been a series of articles which I have been reading in Via Media News, which is an Anglican website, and which has had the umbrella title "We can't go back".

A variety of writers have reflected on lockdown week by week and have been exploring the things which they have learned during this time. They have talked particularly about the things which we need to let go, as well as the things we need to hold on to, and to take forward, as we emerge out of lockdown.

One of the contributors, Nicholas Henshall, Dean of Chelmsford, entitles his piece "We can't go back to being focused on our own significance"..

What he meant by this was that this period of the Church being set aside has given people an opportunity to face ourselves as we really are as a Church. He remarks, for example, on the way in which people have been offering exemplary pastoral care to one another, without clerical intervention; and have found new ways of praying.

As people have been unable to come together for public worship, many people have discovered the joy of saying the daily office, for example, maybe for the first time. Whether using tried and trusted prayer books which, perhaps, had been gathering dust on a shelf for years, or joining the many live-streamed services which have been on offer, there has been a sense in which disciples have been "given back the reins" in terms of their devotional lives, notwithstanding the sense of deprivation we have all felt at not being able to receive Holy Communion.

There has also been much in the press about how during this time neighbours, who had maybe lived in the same road for years but have never spoken to each other, have formed new friendships - sometimes as a result of coming out onto the street for the weekly "clap" for the NHS, or by either being part of one of the many volunteer groups which have sprung up, delivering groceries, medicines etc. to those who have been shielding...and there are those who have been on the receiving end of this kindness of strangers, which has been a lifeline for them during these difficult months.

We hear stories of how people have become more connected to one-another, recognising the importance of relationships, and taking time to keep in closer touch with family and friends than they maybe did before.

We will all have seen Captain Tom, the heroic 100-year-old who raised millions of pounds for the NHS by walking up and down his garden with his zimmer frame.

All these things about the best of human nature have come to the fore, giving tangible expression to the joy, simplicity and mercy of the gospel, as people have pulled together and supported one another more.

Of course, it's not a completely rosy picture, and we do also hear reports of anti-social behaviour but, today, I'd like to consider the positive things we've learned, that we want to hold onto as a new way of being and to make a conscious decision "not to go back" to old, maybe more self-concerned ways of living, whether as Church or as individuals.

In the parable we heard in our Gospel reading, we have three final pictures from Matthew's collection of Jesus' images of Christian community.

In this parable about the pearl, Jesus is saying that the Kingdom is an unexpected treasure which can change the whole of life, like winning the pools or the lottery - except that God's gifts change us only for the good, and fill our lives with meaning and joy.

Of course, we know that God's call is demanding: you've got to pay a price for the field in which the treasure lies, or the genuine pearl you find at a car boot sale.

For Jesus, the new discoveries are the things which bring us new visions of the Kingdom...and with the new discoveries come decisions.

The gospel of the Kingdom isn't a nice, fuzzy, warm-glow religious idea that can be explored and then put aside to be looked at as and when time permits.

No, it's like the biggest, finest, purest pearl that any jeweller ever imagined...and it's yours for the taking, if you sell everything else you own in order to buy it.

The pearl, of course, represents the gospel of the Kingdom which Jesus is announcing and embodying.

The parables in this chapter are a challenge to us at two levels: understanding and action. Understanding without action is sterile; action without understanding is exhausting and useless.

There are things from the BC time (Before Corona) which are good and important and we want to take up again, such as being able to come to mass again and be nourished and sustained by the sacrament; but there may also be things we now want to do differently.

As we come out of lockdown, if we are to be true to our baptismal calling, we need to recognise those negative things about the way our lives were before, and to set our sights on learning from them, so that we can discover how we can bear the new, fresh fruit of the kingdom in our daily lives.

As we ponder Jesus' stories, and think about what they meant then and mean now, we should be turning the question on ourselves, asking "what do they mean for me? What are the implications of them for my life and the way I make my choices? How do I bring "Kingdom values" into the way I treat other people? What has this period of lockdown taught me about my discipleship?"