

## Second Sunday after Trinity, June 16<sup>th</sup> 2024

**Ezekiel 17:22-end; Mark 4:26-34**

What's the Kingdom of God?

It's not just another way of talking about Heaven, about whatever is waiting for us after we die. Christians do have a hope for after death, but sometimes we've thought a bit too much about that. When Jesus spoke of his Kingdom, he meant something here and now too.

The Kingdom of God is not Heaven, or not just Heaven anyway. It's this world, when God is made King. In other words, when the prayer, thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven, has been really answered.

It's when every different part of *this* world, and this life, is shot through with the will of God – when everything about us is as God wants it. How we treat each other, how we handle our money, how we live our sexuality, how we tend the planet and care for the other species within it. How we nurse the sick, how we welcome strangers, how we forgive each other .... *everything* about us, lived as God would want it. Where 'love the Lord your God, and love your neighbour as yourself' is not a spectacularly hopeless ideal, but a simple description of how things are. *That's* the Kingdom of God.

But, you might say, that *is* a hopeless ideal. That has never been, and never will be. Things here will never be just as God wants them. It's all gone too wrong, too messed up for that.

Well, says the Gospel, look at Jesus of Nazareth. He's it. He's the one in whom everything came right, who did love the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength and his neighbour as himself. He was the supremely *right* human being, the one in whom God's will is done on earth as it is in Heaven. He is Heaven translated into earth, or as St John puts it, the Word made flesh. If you want to know what God's kingdom is like – and if you want to know that it's real – look at Him.

The Kingdom of God, says Jesus, is like a mustard seed. Tiny, insignificant, unremarkable – and yet, with such a destiny. To become the greatest of trees, to have the birds of the air take shelter in its boughs. From the little seed comes awesomeness out of all comparison.

I wonder if he was thinking of himself? After all, he must have seemed to many tiny, insignificant, unremarkable. Yes, of course, there were signs and wonders, healings and so on – but many will have heard those stories and shrugged, or assumed it was some kind of fraud, or said there were plenty of other healings claimed by plenty of other teachers. Jesus wasn't that special. He certainly didn't seem that special to the powerful of his day, both priests and Romans, who just swatted him out of the way. We have a tendency to think that everyone involved in the crucifixion must have known it was something hugely important ... they probably didn't. They killed him casually: just another minor irritant, just another body.

In John 10, Jesus does compare himself to a seed – and he does it precisely when he’s thinking about the crucifixion and trying to make sense of it. ‘Unless a seed falls into the earth and dies,’ he says, ‘it remains but a single seed. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.’ This is a way into one of the greatest mysteries of our faith: why, exactly, did Jesus have to die? Now that is obviously a question with many answers, but in John 10 Jesus suggests that it’s *something* to do with the fact that only through death does he become something greater than himself. Only through death does he become more than the tiny, insignificant individual wandering around Galilee and Jerusalem in the first century. If he dies, if the husk of his body is broken open and destroyed, it’s as if the inexhaustible, boundless, all-powerful life inside can flood out of Him and into others. He is the seed, planted by God in the heart of human darkness, in all of our sin and misery and death. Planted there, the seed suddenly germinates, springs, begins to push and grow out of itself, begins to grow a tree of life – a tree of life which in the very long run becomes *us*. As he taught somewhere else: I am the vine, you are the branches. The whole point of the Gospel is that through his death and resurrection, Jesus grows into us. He becomes the beating heart of very own lives, our own innermost energy and reality.

That’s what this ritual of bread and wine is all about. You eat this bread and drink this wine, and it becomes part of your being – plain, ordinary digestion: you are what you eat. And the same is true on the spiritual level: what this bread, this wine, symbolises is the body and blood of Christ: his life, his energy, his beating heart. You receive it in faith, and you are what you eat: *here*, he becomes your heart. *Here*, you receive the life, the character, that makes you what He was – and over time, makes you like Him, makes you someone in whom God is well pleased, makes you someone in whom God’s will is done on earth as in heaven, makes you part of the Kingdom of God.

And if that doesn't move you to gratitude, and worship, and discipleship ... I don't know what will. To our Lord Jesus, the Seed, dead, buried, risen that first Easter morning and rising still in glorious new life within us and around us, to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen!