

THE PRO-CATHEDRAL Of HOLY TRINITY

10.30am Sunday 14th June 2009

Mark 4: 26-34 – Understanding the Kingdom of God

I guess that most of you are too young to remember the Beatles....
Some of their songs were the voice of a generation....

We all live in ayellow submarine
Penny....Lane
Eleanor Rigby
All you need is love
I want to hold yourhand
Its been a hard days.... night

One particular song brought John Lennon in particular into conflict with the Christian Church

Imagine....there's no heaven Imagine....there's no heaven....?

*Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today...*

A song from the 1960's which might have reflected some of the enlightenment thinking and rationalism, of the 1760s.

Actually for most of us...its not difficult to imagine there is no heaven...for most of us, most of the time we are very focused on the here and now, the things that we can see , the things that we can touch and taste.

For many of us that means our focus is on paying the bills, doing the shopping, trying to have a social life and trying to make it to the weekend in one piece...

Having the head space to think about heaven, or eternity or destiny or the spiritual nature of life is just so often beyond us...beyond our energy levels, beyond our human capacity. The reality is... that most of us just have enough energy to live for today.

But our Gospel writer this morning invites us to lift our horizons....to engage with our imaginations...or rather more seriously invites us to think about the 'Kingdom of God' '*...this is what the Kingdom of God is like*' he says in verses 26 and 30.

We are not alone in our struggle or even our non-struggle to understand or to have the headspace to even begin to dream about the Kingdom of God...

Verse 33 & 34

With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything...

And yet we know that despite having everything explained to them the disciples so often just did not understand...

The kingdom of God....the rule of the one true God and its dimensions are beyond our imaging or our conceiving.

The writer of Romans declares

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels, nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord...

These famous word so often words of comfort to us when we are bereaved are also an attempt to grapple with the dimensions of the Kingdom of God....

In Ephesians the writer is longing and praying that we *might grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ...*

Because understanding the Kingdom of God is beyond us....beyond the ways of knowing of the human mind....

Imagine that it is no longer 2009...you have just travelled back to Holy Trinity Brussels 1909....the person you are sitting next to is from the world of 1909....and your task is to describe to them a mobile phone and how it works....

What would you say...how would you describe it....Just try it....

We now take mobile phones for granted...they enable us to speak to and even to see life going on in another place....it may not be in another dimension beyond time and space...but nonetheless we are the first generation of people who can see life going on in another place just as a matter of every day life....

Jesus told parables about every day things to enable his hearers to see beyond the every day...

Verse 26. This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scattered seed on the ground. Night and day whether he sleeps or gets up, the seeds sprout and grow, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces corn – first the stalk, then the ear, then the full kernel in the ear. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it because the harvest has come....

This parable is reminder that the kingdom of God is real, it is not centred around us....whether we are aware of it or not....God is having his way beyond our sight lines....A God who is creative and who has his own timing independent of us...

For we are made in God's image and not the other way around.

Verse 30 Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed that you can plant in the ground. When it is planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade.

A picture of something small and vulnerable that has the capacity become big and strong, the capacity to provide shelter and a home.

A Kingdom where the small and vulnerable is valued... a kingdom which is about growth... a kingdom which is about providing hospitality and home to other..

But why did Jesus talk so much of the Kingdom... why did he work so hard to help his hearer to understand..?

He wanted them to have right perspectives... he wanted them to see beyond the rule of provincial governor, he wanted them to see through the Roman Empire... he even wanted them to see through the Religious Authorities and he wanted them to be properly connected to the rule of God....

Matthew 18 v 3 Unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.....

And my guess is that he wants us to see beyond the Kingdom of Belgium, and through the values of the Empire of the European Union, He might even want us to see through some of the ways of the Church of England

Jesus wanted to break the hold that the powers of this world so easily have upon us and to give us a right sense of our place in the true order of things – the kingdom of God... and a kingdom of God ... that is on earth as well as in heaven a kingdom that is beyond dimension... a kingdom whose neighbourhood policy is cosmic.

Jesus was also at pains to make it plain that the kingdom of God is near. In Marks Gospel its opening words are

The time has come, the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Good News

The dimensions of the kingdom of God include the times and places and realities that we can't yet see, but they also include the near and now. There is no time line... no hole in the fence that we need to go through... the Kingdom of God is seamless

And the challenge of Jesus is not only to see beyond the things that we can see and touch in the here and now, but also to know that they are fully connected to the life of the kingdom...

Lets go back to the mobile phone for a moment...

The mobile phone enables us to interact with life in that other place... actually we can be part of life in that place... while we are still in this place and we can even change events in that other place..... sometimes for ever.

Well this morning the Revd Canon Dr Robert Innes is preaching in one of the college chapels in Cambridge... what would happen if we telephoned him right in the middle of his sermon....it would be fun....it would cause quite a stir....it really would be a sermon that would never be forgotten [perhaps for the wrong reasons]...we would have changed things in that chapel....while we remain here in Holy Trinity...

Imagine that...

The mobile phone – a modern parable of the connectedness of the modern world – a reminder of the reality of the kingdom of God that exists even though we may not be able to see it...a reminder that we are connected to it..even when our heads are down and our horizons are no further than the here and now...a reminder that our actions may have an impact that we may never know...

Gerard Hughes writes in his 'God of All Things' p.50

We are interconnected in ways that our conscious minds will never grasp.... Nuclear physicists write of the close interconnectedness of all things, telling us that when a baby throws a rattle out of its cradle, the planets rock!...Even our observations can effect change. Modern physicists are beginning to sound like mystics.

When we promise to pray about something...when we offer a kind word...or do a good deed, when we challenge an injustice or even simply offer a stranger a smile you may never know the impact that you have had in God's economy. God's kingdom is never very far away from us.

And what about you and me today...the same Jesus invites us to be reconnected to the kingdom that we will never fully understand in this life...

He invites us to hold out our hands and to take the bread into our hands as symbol of the kingdom we cannot yet see...a symbol of our own wanting to be free of the powers of this world...and a child of the Kingdom of heaven.

Imagine!