

MORNING SERVICE

Sunday 26 July, Kilcalmonell, linked with Killean and Kilchenzie

8th Sunday after Pentecost

preacher: Rev Martin Grashoff

hymns: Church Hymnary. Fourth Edition (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2005) / Songs of God's People (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)

Welcome & Intimations

Opening Hymn : 'Humbly in your sight' (SoGP 46)

Children's Talk

Children's Hymn : 'I love the sun' (CH 144)

Prayer & Lord's Prayer

Blessed are you, O God,
for the seeds we sow,
the grain to bring forth rye, wheat or barley.
Blessed are you, O God,
for the seeds we do not sow,
bringing forth young cattle or new pets.
Blessed are you, O God,
for the seeds of new community
which you have planted all around the world
and which we can foster and nurture.
Blessed are you, O God,
for babies born to us.
Blessed are you, O God,
for all the life on earth.
May your blessing prevent us
from damaging this life,
and from failing to protect it.
Forgive us, O God,
our carelessness and indifference.

And now as Jesus taught us, we pray:

Our Father...

...Amen.

Readings : Deuteronomy 4:9-12 (*Good News Bible*) & Matthew 13:1-23 (*new translation*¹)

¹ A colometric-concordant translation. See: F.H. Breukelman, *Bijbelse theologie. 1,1 Schrift-lezing. Een verhandeling over de kolometrische weergave van bijbelse teksten als hulp bij het lezen en als grondslag voor de exegese* (Kampen: Kok, 1980) – probably a good reason to learn Dutch. Some information about colometry, as distinguished from stichometry, in classical texts was already in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th Edition (1910 pass.), now on [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colometry). More can be found in: Bruce M. Metzger,

[Matthew 10:1-23:]

1 That same day, going out of the house,
Jesus sits down beside the sea;
2 and so many crowds are gathering about him,
that he gets into a ship to sit down
and the whole crowd stands on the beach;
3a and he tells them many things in parables, saying:

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3b See! a sower goes out to sow.
4 And while he is sowing some falls beside the road
and the birds come and they eat it up.
5 And some falls on the rocky ground, where it has not much earth,
and immediately it springs up, since it has no depth of earth;
6 but, when the sun rises, it is scorched,
and, because it has no root, it dries up.
7 And some falls among the thistles,
and the thistles come up and choke it.
8 And some falls on the good earth
and it gives fruit,
some hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.
9 Anyone who has ears, must hear!

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10 And coming to him the students say:
Why do you tell them parables?
11 And he answers them, saying:
Because it is given to you
to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,
but it is not given to them;
12 for to the one who has, will be given,
and he will have an abundance,
but from the one who has not,
also what he has will be taken away.
13 This is why I tell them parables:
because seeing they do not see,
and hearing they do not hear, nor understand;
14 and in them is fully completed the prophecy of Isaiah, which says:
indeed you will hear, but not perceive clearly, [=Isa. 6:9]
indeed you will look, but not see –
15 *for this people's heart has been made fat* [=Isa. 6:10]
and with [their] ears they can barely hear
and their eyes they have closed;
lest they would see with [their] eyes
and with their ears hear
and with their heart perceive clearly
and turn around, that I would cure them.

Manuscripts Of The Greek Bible. An Introduction to Greek Palæography (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), which is on [Google Books](https://books.google.com/books) now.

16 Happy are your eyes because they look,
and your ears because they hear;
17 for sure, I say to you,
many prophets and righteous [people] longed
to see what you look [at], but they have not seen it,
and to hear what you hear, but they have not heard it.



18 You then hear the parable of the sower.
19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and doesn't understand it,
the evil one will come and snatch away what is sown in his heart –
this is what is sown beside the road.
20 As for what is sown on the rocky ground,
this is the one who is hearing the word
and immediately receives it with joy,
21 but he has no root in himself and he is transitory,
and when oppression or persecution happen,
immediately he stumbles;
22 As for what is sown among the thistles,
this is the one who is hearing the word
and the concerns of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word
and it becomes unfruitful.
23 As for what is sown on the good earth,
this is the one who is hearing the word
and understands it and makes it work,
some hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.



Hymn : 'Tell out my soul' (CH 286)

Sermon

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus' followers are invited to follow him on his road of proclaiming the kingdom of God. With the Missionary Discourse, which we read last week, they are explicitly sent out to do so. Today we have read the first part of a series of Parables of the Kingdom. This is the third great lesson Jesus teaches his followers, according to Matthew, and it is the most central one.

Learning to apply the Bible to daily life, learning how to live a prayerful life and learning how to judge the real life questions we face from a biblical point of view, is the start. Going out into the world and *doing* it all, is the second and essential step. But the heart of the matter, and indeed a matter of the heart, is the kingdom of God itself. What is it? Where do we find it? Does it exist? That is what this third discourse of Jesus is all about. The kingdom of God, what is it like?

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We should not take anything for granted. Our first question should be: 'Is the kingdom of God really there?' Because if the world would run the way God intended it, then how

can there be such deep and persistent poverty, just around the corner and all around the globe? Then how can it be possible that human greed and abuse of power are still so dominant everywhere on earth? Why are alcohol, drugs or gambling still the escape from despair for so many people? If the peace of God's kingdom would be reality, then why are we discussing to replace the Trident missiles by even more deadly weapons at the cost of possibly as much as £ 78,000,000,000?² And why would banks still be the winners? Or, more generally, why is all value still defined by money? On a more personal level we could ask questions about bullying, abuse, porn, diseases, mental problems, debts and more.

So actually, we can easily find a load of good reasons not to believe that God's kingdom is really among us.

Well, in Jesus' days that was exactly the same. Poverty was all around and the whole of ancient society was built upon slavery. Disease, famine, natural disasters and war – like the white, the red, the black and the pale horses in the book of Apocalypse³ – were the four major reasons why most people got barely as old as forty years. Human greed and abuse of power were exactly the same, money was what made the world turn and the Roman army was the most efficient and deadly one on earth.

So actually, the people listening to Jesus' teachings had plenty reasons to shrug about this promised kingdom of God.

The problem is: many *did* believe it, as have many others after them, throughout the centuries, and down to this very day. Were they wrong? Was it all religious fantasy, an escape from the harsh real world? If it was, it would not have been so incredibly persistent.

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God's kingdom really is present if we dare to believe in parables. If the parable of the good Samaritan can work for us, then the parables of the kingdom can too. All the Jewish people have, ever since the days of Moses, is: *words*.⁴ They never saw God, in any form. Only the first generation heard the Word, and all they did was to pass it on, and on, and on...

² About the UK's current nuclear stockpile:

"In July 1998 Britain's Labour government announced several changes to its nuclear forces following a Strategic Defense Review: Only one British submarine will patrol at any given time carrying 48 warheads. The submarine will patrol at a reduced state of alert - capable of firing its missiles within several days instead of within several minutes. Britain will maintain fewer than 200 operationally available warheads. The weapons are configured flexibly in order to obtain a low yield for 'sub-strategic missions' or higher yields for strategic missions." (source: NuclearFiles.org)

Note that each W76 warhead has an estimated maximum yield of 100 kiloton TNT, or 6-7 times that of the Hiroshima bomb, and each Trident II missile may carry up to 8 of these.

³ Rev. 6:1-7.

⁴ An interesting introduction to Jewish spirituality is: Arthur Green, *These Are The Words. A Vacabulary of Jewish Spiritual Life* (Woodstock, VM, USA: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999).

A parable tells us the truth about a human situation in particular and life on earth in general. But it does so in an indirect way, not as a on-to-one comparison, or a literal description. Simply because the truth has more layers, colours and dimensions than the things we usually call facts. Real life consists from facts, but it gains meaning beyond and above facts only.

The kingdom of God is about true life, the earth and its creatures as God intends them to be, bearing the original blessing of true goodness. Until the end of time this will be a mixed blessing. So, the kingdom which *really is there*, can only be perceived in moments, glimpses, visions. It also is the very stuff of which hope is made.

That is why Jesus tells parables. The kingdom *is like*, or *can be compared to*, it *is likened unto*. It is the likeness of God that we should find. To find that we need to train our ears and our eyes to listen and look differently. We have trained them for daily use, to spot facts and figures. But to perceive God's kingdom we need to hear better and see through the surface. God's kingdom does not appear outwith the facts of life, but beyond and through them. We can easily miss out on them.

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But how do we know if it is true what we think to perceive? How can we be sure that we are not following devout illusions, which will end in bitter disillusion?

All we have is the ability to judge things by their fruits. If there is a wee bit of justice done – as opposed to revenge – then that is a sign of the kingdom. A moment of deep peace, a flash of life-giving wisdom, an hour of heart-warming community, an honest touch of love – that's it. *But* – and that is why it is absolutely essential to train our ears and eyes – that is enough. To see or not to see, that is the question.

Again, it is easy to dismiss these signs of the kingdom. These fruits will not directly turn the course of history. But then: is what we call 'history' the ultimate thing to say about human life? The simple fact is, that as soon as we dismiss these little signs of God's presence among us, life will look rather bleak. And hope may be gone for ever.

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The core of Jesus' teachings, according to Matthew, is proclaiming God's kingdom as truly present among us. And the only way to do that, is to dare living in parables.

It is a paradox with a massive importance: once we have trained our ears and our eyes for that, we can perceive how vulnerable and at the same time how incredibly strong these parables are. *It is like...* – well, there lies our mission before us: to find, share and proclaim the places, times and people that allow us a glimpse inside God's kingdom. Here and now and then for ever more.

Amen.

Hymn : 'Tree of life' (CH 401)

Offering brought forward

Prayer of Intercession

God who is like eternal Light,
God who is like a Son of man,
God who is like a Spirit of grace,
be with us when we dare not see the Light,
when we fail to be as human as we can,
when we refuse to live by grace alone.
Be with all those who cannot see your kingdom
through the bleak curtain of poverty or addiction,
through the frightening vision of a hell on earth,
or through the sheer lack of any future.
And make us dare to hear and see
the fruits of your kingdom appearing among us –
and to share that with all of your people
in words and in deeds,
until your will shall be done
on earth and in the heavens.

In silence we remember those we know
who need us to remember them.

(silence)

So we pray
through Jesus Christ
our Lord and Teacher.
Amen.

Closing Hymn : 'Forth in the peace of Christ we go' (CH 646)

Blessing