

Brackenhurst Methodist 19 Oct 08: 07h45 (Healing) & 09h30 (Baptism)
The Kingdom of God

Call to Worship: Isaiah 61:1-2a

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD, Yahweh is on me,
because Yahweh has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
[and] to proclaim the year of Yahweh's favour.

- Hymn 244: Sing we the King

Opening prayer

Yes Lord, we do indeed sing to you this morning.

We sing because you are our king and you reign over us in ways that we see
everyday.

But we also sing because you reign in ways and in places that we do not see.

You reign where there is hurt and brokenness

You reign in the midst of tragedy and disaster

You reign in the places where it seems least likely that there can be anyone in
control.

Help us, as we gather to worship you today, to aware of your sovereignty, and to look
for you presence, and to reveal your presence, to look for your light, and to reveal
your light, in the midst of those places of darkness.

- Help us, as we worship you, to keep our eyes fixed on you so that we may be
the ones proclaiming your kingdom throughout the world.

We pray this in your name, Amen

Welcome & Notices

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

too often it has not been about your kingdom, but about ours

- Hymn 536: O for a Heart to Praise my God

Offering

Prayers

Scripture:

Mark 1:14-20

- Hymn 138: Seek ye First the Kingdom of God

Message

INTRODUCTION

- Trevor Hudson tells the story of his examination by the Bishop in front of Synod as he candidated for the ministry:
 - “Tell me Mr Hudson,” said the bishop well known for his direct and stern approach. “What was the central message of Jesus?”
 - * “Forgiveness of sins, sir!” he immediately answered.
 - “No,” responded the bishop, matter of factly.
 - * Trevor tried again: “Peace on earth, sir” he said, remembering a line from a Christmas carol about a heavenly host that startled sleepy shepherds in the middle of the night.
 - Again the bishop replied, “No”, and at this point Trevor thought it best to give up trying and said so.
- Trevor tells what happens next this way:

‘Leaning over his desk the bishop caught my eyes in his solid gaze and said, “I want you to never, never forget that the main message of Jesus was, ‘the kingdom of God is at hand.’”’¹.
- The Kingdom of God is at hand.
 - I was fortunate a number of years later when candidated for the ministry and I was asked the same question in that I had just been reading Trevor’s book, and so was able to answer the question immediately and correctly!
- But it is clear that Jesus, after 30 years of preparation, as he comes out of the wilderness having been tempted for 40 days, as he embarks on his life’s work, He preaches a sermon that can be summarised by Mark with what Trevor describes as “one explosive phrase.”
 - The Kingdom of God is at hand
 - * And the rest of the gospel, and the rest of the gospels, Matthew, Luke and John, are really all about how Jesus goes on to demonstrate that.
- But what does it mean when Jesus speaks about the Kingdom of God being at hand?
 - As part of my introduction I want to look briefly at some of the terms that Jesus uses
 - * and then tie that up to what we’ve been saying over the last three weeks as we’ve looked at justification, sanctification and salvation

¹ Hudson, T. Signposts to Spirituality, p 47.

- Now the first thing that we need to realise in understanding the gospels is the background of Jesus' world
 - We need to recognise that Jesus and his followers lived in a community that was under the domination of the Roman Empire
 - * And as such the military — and military imagery — played an enormous role in their day to day lives
 - * Jesus often uses soldiers and armies in his parables and teaching
- The words that Mark has Jesus using in this passage are mainly military words and would have spoken powerfully to the people of the day about a decisive battle being fought.
- Firstly, the word 'time'.
 - Jesus say, "The time has come"
- The word used here is the Greek word *kairos*.
 - There were two words for time: *chronos* = time that passes, and this word 'kairos' which means a definitive, watershed moment.
 - * A moment when from this point on everything is going to be different.
- We may speak in South Africa about the day Nelson Mandela being released from jail was a *kairos* moment for the country
 - Whether we liked it or not, we knew that everything was going to be different
 - * It was also a word used to indicate victory in a battle: the moment that the tide turned and it was clear who was going to win was a *kairos* moment.
- This is what Jesus is saying:
 - "the moment, the time has arrived and from this moment on nothing is going to be the same, the tide has turned, the battle is being won"
- Now because of the fact that the battle is being won by the kingdom of God the appropriate response is to repent and believe.
 - The Greek word used for repent is the word 'metanoia' — another military term
 - * It does not mean you need to be sorry for what you have done
- So often we say our prayers of confession: we are truly sorry and repent of all that we have done
 - And we take it to mean that we really are sorry, and there are a whole lot of connotations that surround this word, usually that have to do with making you feel bad
- No, *metanoia*, a military term, means simply to turn around. It was the word used to describe an about-turn in the army

- It means that you are going in one direction and turn 180' and go in the other direction.
- Let's talk rugby.
 - Next weekend is the Curie cup final: Bulls vs Sharks
 - * Bulls supporters? Sharks supporters? Undecided?
- So because you don't really like any of the teams — you're a Lions supporter — you decide that you're going to cheer for the winning team
 - And it starts out being the Sharks, and so you're shouting for the Sharks, and then after half time the Bulls start to win, and it soon becomes clear that they're going to wipe the floor with the Sharks
 - * And so you stop supporting the Sharks and start supporting the winning team
- You have switched your allegiance
 - You have about turned, You have metanoiaed, You have repented!
 - * Jesus is saying, the Kingdom of God has reached critical mass in the battle, the moment has arrived, therefore switch your allegiance to the winning side and believe the good news
- And that's the last word that I want to look at in my introduction this morning
 - Good news, Greek word *euangelion*
- Once again it is a word associated with war, and literally, it was the word of victory that would be brought from the battlefield to the king.
 - So when the kairos moment had arrived and victory was certain a messenger would be sent back to HQ or wherever the king was safely ensconced to say that the battle is about to be won and that was called the *euangelion*.
 - * Jesus is coming as the messenger bringing a message of decisive victory
- What does this have to do with the kingdom of God?
 - A couple of weeks ago we looked at the word justification and said that there is nothing that we can do to earn God's favour
 - * Jesus has already done it for us, Jesus died for us while we were yet sinners, wicked and ungodly
 - * And this is the only basis for our hope as Christ followers
 - Then we said that sanctification is the process of growing into the person that God makes us to be through justification
 - * John Newton:
 - “I am not what I might be, I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I wish to be, I am not what I hope to be. But I thank God I am not what I once was, and I can say with the great apostle, “By the grace of God I am what I am.””

- And then last week we looked at salvation and how salvation is the bringing together of justification and sanctification and discovering how we can live lives that are whole, and lives that bring healing into our communities and world.
- Today we wrap our sermon series on words up by recognising that justification, sanctification, and salvation are all about proclaiming the Kingdom of God, about proclaiming to the world that Jesus has won a decisive victory and that this is a wonderful opportunity to be a part of the winning team.
- So very briefly, let's look at the Kingdom of God
 - Firstly as a present reality
 - Then as a future reality
 - And then at our responsibility as a church

(1) Kingdom as Present Reality

- Last week when I spoke about salvation I said that salvation was not just about something that happens when you die
 - salvation is not just about your soul being saved so that go to heaven one day
 - * But that salvation is something which begins in this life
- It is the process of being made whole here and now, and taking a hold of the new life which Jesus Christ offers for our transformation today.
 - The reason we can do that is because when Jesus came with the good news of a battle being won
 - * He didn't say that the kingdom is far off in the future
 - * he didn't say that the kingdom is only accessible once you die
 - he said that the Kingdom of God is at hand!
 - * it is near enough to reach out and touch; to reach out and take a hold of.
- So every time we read scripture and we read a teaching about the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven — those terms are used interchangeably
 - And particularly in the gospels
 - * We should be looking out for the for the potential for the kingdom to be revealed today.
- Let me give you an example
 - Jesus speaks about needing to enter the kingdom through the narrow door or narrow gate (Lk 13:22-30; Mt 7:13-14).
- Generally when we read the passage or hear a teaching on it we assume the story to mean that you get into heaven through the narrow door or gate
 - That we've got to work at living righteously
 - * that we have to earn our salvation

- But hang on a minute!
 - That's not true — we've already learnt that Jesus has done it all, we can't do anything in addition
 - * So what could Jesus mean?
- When read the story in Matthew's gospel with open eyes Matthew says, "small is the gate, and narrow the road that leads"... not to the kingdom of heaven, but
 - "to LIFE!"
- So the present dimension of the Kingdom of God is that by choosing to live according to the teachings of the life giver
 - we don't earn salvation, we don't earn our way into heaven
- We can experience life; we can live life to the full and in abundance!
 - Not to go to see the kingdom one day when we die, but to experience a fuller life today
- To experience the Kingdom of God at hand
 - to discover the riches of God's kingdom in the midst of the places where it is darkest!
 - The kingdom of God is a present reality that we can take hold of

(2) Kingdom as Future Reality

- But when we look at Jesus — and Paul's — teaching on the kingdom of God there is more to it than that
 - there is a promise of the day when the Kingdom will come in fullness
- Because as much as we can understand that the Kingdom has come in principle we also know that it doesn't always feel very much as though we're living in God's Kingdom
 - We may catch glimpses of the Kingdom of God, but life is tough, and sometimes; most times; it seems that there is a whole lot more darkness than light.
- We just have to look around us at the mess that the world is in
 - The Kingdom of God, while it is a present reality, it is still not fully realised
 - * it is still a future reality as well
- As we've been speaking about the the battle, and the euangelion we recognise that although the tide has turned, the battle hasn't yet been won!
 - The final whistle has still not been sounded, and the Sharks are still giving the Bulls a hard time.
- Nicky Gumbel uses the illustration of the close of the second world war
 - The battle was effectively won with the Normandy landing on D-Day 6 June 1944

- * But there was another 11 months of cleaning operations on the go before victory was declared in Europe on May 7 & 8 1945.
- So there is also, in the term ‘Kingdom of God’ the promise of a better world which is to come

(3) The Work of the Church

- I hope that as we read scriptures, and as we live in community with one another and as we journey together with Jesus learning about how to live
 - I hope that we begin to have a clear picture in our minds and our lives of the kingdom of God and how things ought to be
 - * I think we do
- We know inherently when things are wrong and ought to be different
 - We know when people are acting unjustly
 - We get frustrated when bad things happen, when crime happens to us and others, when people are hurt, when young people die in motor accidents
 - * When people die of illness and disease
- We know that this isn't the way things ought to be
 - We know that there is a different reality and I think that the reason people were so attracted to Jesus is because he proclaimed this different way of life, this different reality to the people he met
 - * And people saw in him the way things ought to be
- He inaugurated the kingdom and offered a new way
 - yes, in the present, but also in the future
 - * Experiencing the Kingdom of God today is not easy — it truly is the narrow way and the small gate
- Now the work of the church is to take the future dimension of the Kingdom, that reality which is not yet realised in this present existence of ours
 - * And to make it real for people who are in darkness
 - To make it possible for people to discover the narrow way that leads to Life.
- See, after Jesus has made this earth shattering, explosive announcement about the Kingdom of God being at hand he sets out to perform his first task in ministry
 - And that is to gather around him a group of people who believe his message
 - And who are willing to proclaim that message to the world,
- Jesus sees fishermen beside the sea of Galilee
 - And he calls Simon and Andrew and James and John
 - * And he says to them, “I will make you fishers of men and women”
- He begins to build the foundations of a community who will be responsible for proclaiming this powerful, explosive message to others.

- A community which later became the church
- A community which has as its core faith in the message of Jesus and a deep desire to bring that future reality of which Jesus spoke into the present,
- A community which would build its life as though the Kingdom is here even though many times it is not seen.
- And the church isn't Neil and Peter
 - The church is every single person who says that they follow Christ as Lord
- Yet, somehow, I think, we've lost sight of that.
 - instead of announcing the wonders, joys, light of the Kingdom we are so busy denouncing everybody else and what they're doing wrong, that we don't get to speak the good news to anybody
 - * We think that our work is to condemn sin, rather than announce good news
 - * We call people to repent and what we should be saying is, "There's a winning team that you can be a part of", there's a better way of living
 - but instead
 - * Leave your sinful ways before becoming part of the winning team
 - * There's a subtle difference, I think.
- Evangelism is not telling everybody else that they're bad and are going to burn in hell
 - Evangelism is not even exalting in that fact that you're on the winning team and others are not
- Rather it is announcing that the forces of good have overcome the forces of evil, that the Kingdom of light has overcome the kingdom of dark and dark will not overcome it
 - That the small amount of yeast will make the whole batch rise, that the salt flavours the whole dish, that the mustard seed grows into a tree is big enough for many birds and the nets will not be able to contain all the fish.
 - * That the kingdom of God is not out there, in the distant future, but is discovered here instead.
- I pray deeply that we will learn that as a church, and that we will begin to implement that.
 - May it be so for you, even as it is for me.
- Amen

Prayers of Response and Intercession, Healing ministry

- Hymn 816: Happy the Souls to Jesus Joined

Benediction & Doxology