

Christ the King and the Kingdom of God/Heaven
Sermon for Christ the King (year C) 20-11-16
Readings: Jer. 23. 1-6; Col. 1.11-20 & Luke 23. 33-43

(Opening Prayer)

What an amazing world we live in! I am particularly struck by how God provides, just when we are in need! (Although we might not perhaps notice it at the time, or think something happening is unconnected with our need).

Perhaps I should explain!

Last weekend I was on residential at Queens Theological Foundation. Friday evenings consist of community worship, dinner, community discussion, cell group discussion and then free time – to look at any preparation work not yet done, socialising in the common room and the like. On Saturdays we are currently studying Mission & Evangelism – we have four x 1 ½ hour tutorial sessions interspersed with worship, coffee, food, more worship, more coffee, more food, and the final session ends at around 8.30pm when again our time is our own. On Sundays the format is the same except there are only two tutorial sessions and we are allowed home after lunch! Last Saturday our final session of the day was not a normal tutorial – instead we settled down with beer, wine and chocolate to watch a movie – a children’s film at that.

You might wonder what watching a kids movie had to do with our Saturday subject of Mission & Evangelism, or even what it had to do with today’s subject of Christ the King, and God providing when

needed. I didn't realise at the time either. But the connection has come to me since, and I wish to share it with you.

Saturday was spent discussing the '1st mark of mission' and how it relates to 'the Kingdom' – the Kingdom of God/ Kingdom of heaven, and the film we watched was about kingdoms. I'll tell you about the film in a while.

It didn't occur to me until half way through the week just how pertinent this work on the kingdom was to today in the church's calendar. Now I don't think God arranged the module timetable at Queens, but I am grateful that through the Spirit, I was able to make the connection, and this is what we might mean by God providing when we are in need. In a way, to be provided with what we need is giving us a glimpse of the kingdom of God, since in that kingdom, we will never want for anything.

To have a 'Kingdom' though, one presumably has to be a King! Our Gospel reading speaks of Jesus' crucifixion. The inscription on the cross read 'This is the King of the Jews'. The soldiers mocked Jesus, taunting him, saying that if he was the Messiah of God, God's chosen one, really the king of the Jews, then he should be able to save himself. But Jesus is a different sort of King. One of the criminals crucified with Jesus is also derisive, and even asks Jesus to save them as well as himself. The other criminal sees clearly that they have done wrong and deserve to be crucified, but that Jesus has done no wrong and shouldn't be there. He asks Jesus to remember him when Jesus comes into his kingdom – and Jesus responds by

saying that this criminal who declares Jesus innocence will indeed be with Jesus in Paradise.

As far as I am aware, none of us are criminals, but this passage does give hope that even those who do wrong on this earth - and the wrongs don't have to be of a criminal nature - those who do wrong and ask for forgiveness, who believe Jesus to be King, will reach fullness of life in Paradise.

There are not many descriptions of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven in the Bible. It is mentioned a fair amount, but not actually described very much. For the most part Jesus describes the kingdom using metaphors, but this passage describes it as Paradise. In the earlier part of this chapter from Luke's Gospel during Jesus' first encounter with Pilate, he refuses to say if he is a king or not – Pilate asks if Jesus is king of the Jews? And Jesus response is 'you say that I am', but it is in John's Gospel that we hear Jesus telling Pilate that his 'kingdom is not of this world'. Jesus is a different sort of king. I wonder how we really see the kingdom of heaven? Do we have good enough imaginations or insight to understand the metaphors Jesus used? Such as 'the kingdom is like a mustard seed....', or 'the kingdom of heaven is like yeast....', the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field'.... and all of those are from Matthew's Gospel, not Luke. In Luke the kingdom is not described 'because the kingdom of God is in your midst'. (17.21)¹

¹ The Bible (NRSV) Luke 17.21

Which brings me to the film we students watched last Saturday night. It was called 'Bridge to Terabithia', and is the story of a young boy and young girl who live next door to each other. They both have quite miserable lives, both are teased at school, and because of this they become friends. They have adventures in the woods next to their homes and in the woods there is a deep stream that they have to cross. They do this using a rope swing that just happens to be hanging there! Once across the stream, the woods are a grand place to explore and they find a tumble down tree house which over time they rebuild. The girl has an amazing imagination, but the boy is grounded in his thoughts. The girl teaches the boy to open his mind rather than his eyes, to see the kingdom of Terabithia. They don't create the kingdom, it is already there, but they have to have open minds to see it, to see the Paradise that it is. The boy has a little sister who would really like to join them in the woods, but she is too small to use the rope swing, so they never let her go with them. I won't spoil the story in case you want to borrow the dvd, but in the end, the boy builds a bridge over the stream so his little sister can get to the tree house and beyond. Having had his mind opened, he then opens the kingdom of Terabithia for his little sister.

And so it is with us. We need to open our minds and allow the kingdom, the kingdom that Christ is king of, to permeate our thinking and our lives, so that we in turn can open the minds of others. There is a rope swing (or bridge) to help us across. Christ is our King, Christ is the rope swing/bridge for us to gain access to his kingdom of

another world. If we open our minds, we can see all that is promised to us. Christ died to become King, died so that we might be forgiven, died that we might join him in Paradise. Let us cross that bridge, use the swing rope, and open our minds

May Christ who has opened the Kingdom of Heaven bring us to reign with him in glory.²

Amen

² Concluding Prayer from CW Morning Prayer from All Saints' Day until the day before the First Sunday of Advent.