

The kingdom of God – A topsy turvy world!

As we look through the gospel I think we are already finding twists and turns that we did not expect. Today will be no exception. Jesus and the Kingdom of God defy the inherited wisdom of man for the wisdom of God. A kingdom whose topsy turvy values cast a bright light into a darkened world.

Matthew's tour of the life of Jesus continues. He has taken us through the heat of the desert to see John baptising and preparing the world for the Son of God. We have been taken into the wilderness and witness the testing of Jesus. We have felt the strain as John the Baptist is arrested which is the point at which the light of God begins to dawn, heralding the coming of his kingdom in the hearts and minds of men, women, boys and girls.

Matthew this time takes us to the shores of lake Galilee. Some of you have been there and can imagine the scene. There are a number of boats by the lakeside, there is that fishy smell in the air and the birds are squawking and flying around the boats out in the lake. Some men work away silently, others laugh and speak in the manner of all male company. A long figure is walking along the shore line vs 18

“As Jesus was walking beside the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew.”

Some who spot him have seen him before speaking on various occasions. He has become the subject of rumour, gossip and speculation.

From the other gospels we know that Andrew is a devout man who has been a disciple of John the Baptist but when Jesus was baptised by John went and spoke with Jesus and took his brother Simon to see him as well.

The kingdom of God has been dawning gently on their lives, drawing them bit by bit. An encounter here, a meeting there until one day when they were on the shoreline casting nets into the shallows Jesus said to them words that echo in time yet, ‘Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men’ vs 19. This is the call of the kingdom of God on every human being of every age.

The Kingdoms' Call

There response is quite amazing

There and then they hand in their notice! Vs 20 “At once they left their nets and followed him”.

Is this some blind impulsive act? Of course not. This is a carefully considered surrender of their lives to the Lordship and leadership of Jesus. Over the previous weeks, maybe even months they have

heard him, spoken with him, seen he is an exceptional individual.

At the time the Rabbi or teacher would be approached by a potential disciple to be schooled under him. Jesus turns that in its head and approaches his disciples. But of course a Rabbi was himself to have been schooled by another Rabbi to be kosher and only the brightest and the best were chosen.

Here is the Son of God. The author of truth coming to a bunch of burly fishermen, unschooled ordinary men and saying come follow me.

I have mentioned this in the past but I find this is the beauty of the gospel. Jesus chooses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. His grace is the great leveller, all who would come to him – highborn or lowborn, prince or pauper must come to him by the same road to receive the free gift of forgiveness. The must all come along the road of repentance and acknowledge their sin and believe. Money, status, intellect mean nothing to the King of Kings. He knows the heart of man is the same the world over. Whether in the seat of power or the seat of poverty – all must come to the great physician of the soul, the healer of the heart, the forgiver of our sin and the giver of renewed life.

The call of the kingdom stands. And the voice of Jesus is echoing in this room today – can you hear him speaking through the pages of scripture. Can you see the look in his eye as he approaches and ask us? ‘Come follow me’. Surrender to him and let him lead you into kingdom living.

Imagine how that must have felt for Simon and Andrew. Simon had a wife. Things to consider. But it must have felt thrilling and nerve wrecking at the same time. Imagine how that must have felt. Thrilling and Nerve wrecking at the same time. This week at an activity camp with 40 children from breahead primary school. One of the activities involved climbing 18 meters up a tree and then walking across a pole to another tree. I am not keen on heights. When I reached the top and stood up it took me a good minute to be able to let go of the tree and just walk on a pole 18 meters above the ground. It was thrilling and nerve wrecking at the same time. But the reality was I was always 100% safe because I was strapped to a safety rope and harness and the care of a trained instructor. For all who hear the call there are considerations to be made but the thing to do is remember who it is that is asking. Jesus – the Son of God and so no matter what happens we are always 100% in his care.

What will our answer be – ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Reject the Son of God or commit to him maybe for the first time or recommit to him? Throughout our lives there are

points where I think we firm up on our commitment after a period of waning. 'Come follow me' Jesus Christ says to everyone of us this morning. Surrender to his lordship and mastery over our lives and let him lead us into the dawning of his light into our lives. I say yes Lord.

Of course disciple means learner. When we follow him as his disciples we are learning what it means to be God's people, in his place under his rule and his blessing. That is what the Kingdom of God means – God's people in his place under his rule and his blessing.

For Andrew and Simon that will mean taking gifts they had learned, gathering fish from the sea and transforming them into the gathering of men and women into the kingdom. He has given them a new career and a noble purpose. Our career may not change but our purpose may. All we do as employers, employees, parents, singles, friends is given over to him and no longer are we saying predominately what do I want from my life but Lord what do you want with my life. Help me to make sure that everything I do is of service to you. And we let the rule of God lead us and something of the light of Christ shine in and through us.

Isn't that it? Isn't that what being a follower of Jesus in the 21st century means. So often we get it the other way round don't we– we want Jesus to come follow

us wherever we lead. Lord come here and bless my investments or property portfolio. Lord follow me here and bless my interview. Rather than Lord I follow you, here is all I have. Show me the wisest way to live. Show me what you want to do with what I have.

These first disciples left everything. James and John too. The priority in the kingdom of God as we will see time and again is people and proclamation not possessions.

What was the lottery prayer in the early days of the lottery. 'Lord I know I am a sinner but make me a winner'. That is a health and wealth gospel. The gospel of prosperity that keeps 2/3rds of the world impoverished and 1/3 languishing in relative affluence. It is a gospel that as we will see in future weeks is the complete antithesis of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But for those first who followed, these men would become a band of brothers. That day was the first day of many happy years of service together. Yes they will face trial and hardship as the good news of Jesus Christ challenges the other gospels of its day. But what nobler purpose to give their lives to than heralding heaven's news and live as God's people under his rule and blessing – sharing the Kingdoms' hope.

The Kingdoms' Hope

Again Matthew is painting pictures for us. The baptism in chapter 3 we saw like a coronation for the King of kings, the testing in the desert to see what kind of king he will be, obedient to his heavenly father or fall for the lures of instant fame, riches and recognition. And now vs 23 here is the son of King David (which Matthew makes clear 1:17), this newly anointed Messiah monarch sweeping through the land gaining followers bringing hope. This will contrast greatly with the end of the gospel – the great King, welcomed at first crucified at the last but for now see him

Vs 23 “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom (repent, come follow me and find yourself amongst God’s people in his place under his rule and blessing), and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon possessed, those having seizures, and the paralysed , and he healed them”

What is happening here? Is this true? If we think that God is real and Jesus is the son of God then why wouldn’t these events have happened? But why all these healings? There are two reasons 1. here is the Son of God who has authority over all the realms of men – physical realm and the spiritual realm. But

secondly and the main reason is spelt out for us in chapter 9, one of my favourite stories. You know it well, the paralysed man is lowered through the roof by his friends. Jesus looks at him and says, son your sins are forgiven. Everyone is expecting a healing but Jesus says, son your sins are forgiven. Jesus healing ministry is a sign of something greater. The healing of our souls. The need for our forgiveness to get right with God. Because Jesus analysis of every human is that we are sin sick and that is destroying our relationship at all levels – within families, communities, nations and with God. And the solution is to turn around (repent), come to him the healer of our souls for the forgiveness he purchases at the cross and be, as it were, reborn, made new.

And Jesus at the end of the story says and just to prove that is the case – take up your bed and walk to the paralysed man.

Matthew creates the beautiful picture in verse 12-17 of a light dawning. A Christ appears on the horizon of history light dawns and in his wake comes the kingdom of God and the kingdoms hope.

Still it is dawning, it’s early morning rays piercing the darkness of sins sick hearts and minds, casting light and clarity and understanding.

And this is where the rub comes. Here again comes the call of the kingdom to us. The call of the gospel to

each of us. The call of Jesus. It should not matter supposing we have heard it a thousand times we should all respond. That call is this:

First you need to count the cost for there is one to following Jesus. And having done that will you come and follow him, will you let his light shine in the darkness of your own heart and mind? Surrendering all to him, let him cleanse you from you sin and be made new/reborn in your heart, mind, body and soul. And leave from here today changed because you have committed yourself or re-committed yourself to following him whose kingdom is love. What is your answer for him this morning? Yes or no? I say yes _ receive your kingdom hope, the healing of my soul, and I hear your kingdom call and in which you choose ordinary folk through which to do extraordinary things.