

## Morning Worship

### Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> February – Second Sunday in Lent

#### Hymn – The kingdom of God

The kingdom of God  
is justice and joy,  
for Jesus restores  
what sin would destroy;  
God's power and glory  
in Jesus we know,  
and here and hereafter  
the kingdom shall grow

The kingdom of God  
is mercy and grace  
the captives are freed,  
the sinners find place,  
the outcast are welcomed  
God's banquet to share  
and hope is awakened  
in place of despair.

The kingdom of God  
Is challenge and choice,  
believe the good news,  
repent and rejoice!  
His love for us sinners  
brought Christ to the cross,  
our crisis of judgement  
for gain or for loss.

God's kingdom is come,  
the gift and the goal,  
in Jesus begun,  
in heaven made whole;  
the heirs of the kingdom  
shall answer his call,  
and all things cry 'Glory!'  
to God all in all.

#### Confession

Lord God, our maker and our redeemer,  
this is your world and we are your people:  
come among us and save us.

We have wilfully misused your gifts of creation;  
Lord, be merciful:  
**forgive us our sin.**

We have seen the ill-treatment of others  
and have not gone to their aid;  
Lord, be merciful:  
**forgive us our sin.**

We have condoned evil and dishonesty  
and failed to strive for justice;  
Lord, be merciful:  
**forgive us our sin.**

We have heard the good news of Christ,  
but have failed to share it with others;  
Lord, be merciful:  
**forgive us our sin.**

We have not loved you with all our heart,  
nor our neighbours as ourselves;  
Lord, be merciful:  
**forgive us our sin.**

*Psalm 22:23-end*

- 23 Praise the Lord, you that fear him;  
O seed of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, O seed of Israel.
- 24 For he has not despised nor abhorred the suffering of the poor;  
neither has he hidden his face from them;  
but when they cried to him he heard them.
- 25 From you comes my praise in the great congregation;  
I will perform my vow in the presence of those that fear you.
- 26 The poor shall eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek the Lord shall praise him;  
their hearts shall live for ever.
- 27 All the ends of the earth  
shall remember and turn to the Lord,  
and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.
- 28 For the kingdom is the Lord's  
and he rules over the nations.
- 29 How can those who sleep in the earth  
bow down in worship,  
or those who go down to the dust kneel before him?
- 30 He has saved my life for himself;  
my descendants shall serve him;  
this shall be told of the Lord for generations to come.
- 31 They shall come and make known his salvation,  
to a people yet unborn,  
declaring that he, the Lord, has done it.

### Collect

Almighty God,  
whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness,  
and was tempted as we are, yet without sin:  
give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to your Spirit;  
and, as you know our weakness,  
so may we know your power to save;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

### Readings

Isaiah 11:1-9

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,  
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.  
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,  
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.  
His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide by what his ears hear;  
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.  
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,

and a little child shall lead them.  
The cow and the bear shall graze,  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,  
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.  
They will not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea.

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-46

He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'

He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'

'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.'

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.'

### Sermon – Paul Day – The Kingdom of God

Today we continue with our sermon series looking at what the life of the churches here in Shirley Parish could or should be like when we emerge from the Covid restrictions. Which things that we have learned and taken on board in this last year will we carry forwards? Which things from the past pre Covid days will we pick up again? Which things might be better for us to thank God for, but leave in the past?

Throughout Lent we will use our sermons on Sundays (with the exception of Mothering Sunday) to talk about aspects of what being a church is all about. Each sermon will end with a few questions for us to consider. We will talk

about these in the zoom discussion groups on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Anyone without access to zoom is encouraged to talk over the phone with friends, and to give me a ring or drop me a line with their thoughts. It is possible of course that the sermon as written and published with the printed pewslip could change slightly by the time it is recorded and preached for the Sunday to enable it to reflect some of the thoughts and ideas that have come out of the discussions.

You will remember that last week we began by saying that our priorities as we move forwards should be

- encouraging more people to follow Jesus,
- helping those of us who already follow to follow him more closely
- and helping establish the Kingdom of God.

And we said too that our worship should embrace all three of these.

The church is sometimes criticised for being too inward looking – for only thinking about itself as an organisation and not worrying about the world beyond. It's worth noting that two of those priorities (encouraging people to follow Jesus and helping establish the Kingdom) are concerned with the world "outside the church", and the third one is really about helping us grow into the people God wants us to be so that we can achieve the other two priorities.

So today I want to think about what it might mean for us to help establish the Kingdom of God – we will then think about the other 2 priorities next week..

The Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of Heaven – they mean the same thing) is a phrase that is used a lot in the gospels. Jesus tells people they are not far from the Kingdom of God; he says the Kingdom of God is close at hand; he picks everyday things and says the Kingdom of God is like this – like a mustard seed, like treasure in a field, like someone sowing seed. So what does he mean when he uses this phrase, and what does he want us to do.

One common misapprehension is to think that Kingdom of God means the same as heaven, that it's to do with where we go when we die – perhaps this is because the phrase Kingdom of Heaven is sometimes used (particularly in Matthew's gospel) or maybe it's because we know that God is in control in heaven. Jesus is quite clear though that it is to do with the here and now. "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven". The Kingdom of God is about God's reign, God's authority being extended from heaven to earth.

Another way of looking at it is that it is the ultimate reality – the way things were always intended to be. Someone once said “you don’t die into it, you awaken into it”. I think they meant that when we follow Jesus, when we accept him as our King if you like, we enter into the fullness of life that he spoke about. Perhaps a bit like moving from black and white to colour.

In the beginning God created a world that was perfect. Read the opening chapter of Genesis to hear the wonderful poetic account of the creation – “and God saw that it was very good.” But as we read on we see that things didn’t stay that way for long. People began to go their own way, ignoring God’s call on their lives. Soon the whole world was far away from the world God created. It was as if it were subject not to the authority or control of God, but some other power – “the world” we might call it. The Apostle Paul often uses the word “the flesh”. Some might call it the devil.

What Jesus is saying is that we need to get back to God being in control. We need to be subject to his ways and his authority. This is what the Kingdom of God is like – God back in control. It’s a Kingdom not about geography, but about who is “in charge”, who is “calling the shots” we might say.

To help us try to understand this let me take a risk and talk about Brexit. One of the straplines of the Brexit debate was that the UK should ‘take back control’. The situation (rightly or wrongly) was described as if the EU had wrested away sovereignty and control from the UK. We no longer lived under our own laws and guidelines but under those of a distant power. Leaving the EU would give us back control.

If our calling as Christians is to help establish the Kingdom of God, it is about putting God back in control – of all we are and all we do. It’s about showing people what lives with God in control look like. It’s really all about discipleship, about following Jesus because his life was the life that perfectly recognised the authority of God. So living lives that help establish the Kingdom effectively means living out lives that closely follow Jesus.

And we can pick out strands of what this means by looking at both Jesus’ example and his teaching. His example as shown by his spending time with those in need, by showing us how to serve by washing his disciples’ feet and by his challenging those who were in positions of power and wealth. His teaching by thinking of his command to love, his reinterpretation of the Old Testament laws (you have heard, but I say) and his parables of forgiveness and welcome.

When we talk about one of the priorities of the church being to help establish the Kingdom of God we are thinking about doing practical things to show God's love and concern. This could be hands on things we could do here in Shirley – caring within our local community. It could also be to do with wider, perhaps global issues. But it could too move beyond the practical things to involve campaigning and lobbying to make the world a better place.

It doesn't take long to think of areas where things do fall short of God's ideal – locally, nationally and internationally. Poverty, war, refugees, loneliness, anxiety, prejudice, exploitation, pollution, climate change to name just a few. And when we list things like that we can get overwhelmed by the size of the problem and fail to see how anything we can do can make a difference with the small things we can do. But every little thing we can now do helps. You've probably heard the starfish story.

*One day, an old man was walking along a beach that was littered with thousands of starfish that had been washed ashore by the high tide. As he walked he came upon a young girl who was eagerly throwing the starfish back into the ocean, one by one.*

*Puzzled, the man looked at the girl and asked what she was doing. Without looking up from her task, she simply replied, "I'm saving these starfish, Sir". The old man chuckled aloud, "But, there are thousands of starfish and only one of you. What difference can you make?"*

*The girl picked up a starfish, gently tossed it into the water and turning to the man, said, "I made a difference to that one!"*

So what can we do? Where should we put our efforts? These are the questions that we should be thinking about as we prepare to enter the post-Covid world.

Clearly our work with The Sparkhill Foodbank and the Narthex charity is important and will continue to be so. It helps provide food and other necessities to those who are caught in poverty. But should we not also be asking questions about why so many people are having to use foodbanks and why so many people just don't have enough to live on. And going beyond asking questions, to being part of whatever it takes to help bring about a society where foodbanks are no longer required. Addressing the symptoms of an issue is vital, but much better would be to address the root cause. This might not be a comfortable or easy thing to do. Dom Helder Camara – a Brazilian Catholic Archbishop - once said *When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist.*

What other local issues are there that we can help with? Loneliness, isolation, anxiety are all things that have become more prevalent through the lockdowns. Are there ways in which we can offer practical help here? Hosting a place of welcome open to all to come to feel valued and appreciated, establishing the computer skills club that Kate Crocker has spoken about, maybe helping with something like the Family Support Centre at Shirley Baptist Church. Ways of showing God's love to the Shirley community by what we as Christians do.

When we look beyond the Parish we can, as we have thought already, be overwhelmed by the need. But perhaps we could concentrate on a few things that we can do rather than the many things we can't.

One thing would be to build on what we have done with the toilet twinning (the toilets in church house and St John's Church have all been twinned to fund toilets in the developing world). This could be extended to tap twinning or broader issues through organisations like Water Aid. Another area where we can build on what we have already started is in our care for the environment. The churchyard at St James, the garden at St John's, our energy use and the switch to greener solutions.

And it's important to make the things we do become 'whole church' things rather than just the activities of small interest groups. Displays in the buildings, articles in the pewslip and magazine, a focus in sermons and intercessions could all help. And the practical action and fundraising is only part as we have said – there will also be some campaigning as we press for fairer and more just policies across the world.

Helping to establish the Kingdom of God is about the way we live – as churches but also as individuals - in the choices we make, the way we treat the environment and our attitude to others. And one last thought – at the beginning we recalled that one of the images Jesus used was the Kingdom of God being like a mustard seed. The mustard plant was like a weed – once sown it was hard to get rid of; it kept growing and spreading. Maybe when we start to live the kinds of lives that reflect Kingdom values we will see that it begins to spread. That others will see what we do and the kind of people we are and want to join in.

So once more, plenty to think about. I have deliberately started these sermons by thinking of the "world out there" to stop us falling into the trap of being too

insular. How we live in the world is a reflection of what we believe and says something about who we really are.

So some questions for this week .

In what practical ways can the churches make a difference in the community of Shirley?

What questions should we be asking about the way our world is?

How can the churches (and we as individuals) respond to the climate change issue?

How do we make these things issues the whole church is involved in?

### Creed

**We believe in God the Father,  
from whom every family  
in heaven and on earth is named.  
We believe in God the Son,  
who lives in our hearts through faith,  
and fills us with his love.  
We believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
who strengthens us  
with power from on high.  
We believe in one God;  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
Amen.**

### Introduction to the Peace

Let love be genuine. Never pay back evil for evil.  
As far as it lies with you, live at peace with everyone.  
The peace of the Lord be always with you.

Blessing

The love of the Lord Jesus  
draw you to himself,  
the power of the Lord Jesus  
strengthen you in his service,  
the joy of the Lord Jesus fill your hearts;  
and the blessing ...

Hymn – For the healing of the nations

For the healing of the nations,  
    Lord, we pray with one accord;  
for a just and equal sharing  
    of the things that earth affords.  
To a life of love in action  
    help us rise and pledge our word.

Lead your people into freedom,  
    from despair your world release,  
that, redeemed from war and hatred,  
    all may come and go in peace.  
Show us how, through care and goodness,  
    fear will die and hope increase.

All that kills abundant living,  
    let it from the earth be banned:  
pride of status, race or schooling,  
    dogmas that obscure your plan.  
In our common quest for justice  
    may we hallow life's brief span.

You, Creator-God, have written  
    your great name on humankind;  
for our growing in your likeness,  
    bring the life of Christ to mind;  
that by our response and service  
    earth its destiny may find.