

Home Service 25th October 2020

God's Kingdom is come!

So says Bryn Rees in his hymn 'The Kingdom of God' – number 255 in Singing the Faith:

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 prisoners 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 his 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!

Well, sometimes the world seems a very different place to the one Bryn Rees describes in that hymn, but please stop for a few moments and think about the good things that are happening. Have you been touched by the love and care of others, or by the beauty of the world around us, or humbled by all those brave souls who risk life and limb to bring relief to victims of war or persecution or disaster, or serve in the NHS and care homes? If so, give thanks, because these are at the heart of God's Kingdom here among us.....

And yet, even as I write these words I know that so much of the time the world around us falls short of God's ideal, and we have much to grieve over. And sometimes our own actions and inactions do little to reveal the wonders of his Kingdom.

Here is a hymn by the great hymn writer Fred Pratt Green that we can use as a prayer of confession – and of hope. It's number 653 in Singing the Faith:

O Christ, the healer, we have come
to pray for health and plead for friends.
How can we fail to be restored,
when reached by love that never ends?

From every ailment flesh endures
our bodies clamour to be freed;
yet in our hearts we would confess
that wholeness is our deepest need.

How strong, O Lord, are our desires,
how weak our knowledge of ourselves!
Release in us those healing truths
unconscious pride resists or shelves.

In conflicts that destroy our health
we diagnose the world's disease;
our common life declares our ills:
is there no cure, O Christ, for these?

Grant that we all, made in one faith,
in your community may find
the wholeness that, enriching us,
shall reach the whole of humankind.

I find it's quite a difficult hymn to follow and understand – definitely worth a second (or third) reading.

Reflection

The death of David Megginson weighs heavily, and we hold his family and all those who feel his loss in our prayers. David has been with us at Wesley as our premises manager for many years and we will sorely miss his knowledge and expertise, but above all his sunny smile and personality and his willingness always to help and go the extra mile. For the moment, it seems impossible to replace him and, of course, at the personal level that's true. But in God's Kingdom, we are not individuals carrying the weight of the world on our shoulders alone, but we are part of a community, past, present and future, working together to make that Kingdom a reality.

There is a parallel (albeit on a different level) in today's Old Testament reading. It's in Deuteronomy chapter 34. Moses is in sight of the Promised Land and he dies before entering it. Verses 8 & 9 read:

“The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab for thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended. Joshua, son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him, and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the Lord had commanded Moses.”

Joshua had obviously been singled out to take over from Moses well in advance, but it's not always that way.

Jesus himself handed on his ministry and responsibility to Peter, who seemed unsuitable for the job – his impetuosity, his repeated failure to understand what Jesus was telling him, his denial of Jesus. But he was still entrusted by Jesus and he rose to the task and carried the flame, along with the other apostles. It was taken on by Paul and then to countless pastors and teachers and church members since then: the 'bright succession' of Philip Doddridge's hymn 'The Saviour, when to heaven he rose' (669 in Singing the Faith).

In the Kingdom, we are not in competition with one another, but are required to support and encourage one another – to build each other up. And we must also recognise that the Kingdom and its values are not confined within the church walls. If we look at the world around us we will see many, many examples of

people who live their lives according to those values, and one of our most important tasks is to encourage and support them, as well as showing, by our own actions, that the way of love is best.

So we can either look around us at a world that seems to lurch from one crisis to the next and we can despair at the little we can do to influence it. Or we can see the good things that are happening and, armed with the power of the Holy Spirit, do whatever we can to give hope and encouragement to make things better.

So let's bring that world to our thoughts and pray that God's Kingdom values of love and compassion may be ever more widely known and followed.

Let us pray:

Loving God, we know that your way of love is best, and we are called to live by Kingdom values. We pray for the wisdom, courage and strength to follow your way and to encourage others to do the same.

Each of us has our own strengths and concerns. Each of us knows how much we have achieved, how much more we might do, empowered by the Spirit and supported by those around us. So let's take time now to consider whether there is anything more we can do to make the Kingdom a living reality in our lives and the lives of those around us.....

And let's bring all our thoughts together as we say the Lord's Prayer in the words we are most comfortable with.

Our closing hymn is number 672 in Singing the Faith:

Where can we find you, Lord Jesus our master?
We want to serve you and answer your call.
Where do you lead us and ask us to follow?
What should we do in our service to all?

'Go to the hungry, to those who have nothing;
go where the farmlands are empty and bare.
I broke the bread for the people around me;
out of my plenty, think what you can share.

'Go to the homeless, to those who have nowhere;
go where my people sleep out in the rain.
I had no comforts but what others gave me;
offer them shelter, give ease to their pain.

'Go to the outcast, to those who have no-one;
go where my sheep are rejected and lost.
I dined with sinners and reached out to lepers;
go and do likewise and don't count the cost.'

Where will we find you, Lord Jesus our master?
We are your servants who answer your call.
You go before us and there we will follow,
taking our cross in the service of all.

Allan Charles Dickinson

The Blessing:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit fill our hearts and minds as we walk in God's light, rejoice in God's love and reflect God's glory. Amen