

ORDINARY SUNDAY 17 YEAR A 2008

In the name....

The world in which we live is at present a very uncertain place. We do not know when or where the next terrorist attack may come, we sometimes don't even know if we will be safe when we go to work in the morning, when we do our shopping or even when we are walking down the street. In Auckland there have even been suggestions of organising vigilante groups or bringing in the triads from Hong Kong, to make the community safer. Even our young people are becoming involved in crimes that a few years ago we would not have even thought possible. More and more people are living under threat, full of insecurity and worry, for themselves and their loved ones.

So what do our scriptures for today tell us about our current predicament?

In our gospel readings, Jesus tells us three stories about the Kingdom of heaven.

Jesus begins his stories by saying, 'the kingdom of heaven is like....'

The first two stories, the treasure hidden in the field and the pearl of great price are about how precious the kingdom of heaven is, it is something for which you would be willing to give up all your possessions, but it is also something for which you must search, strive and plan.

There are many misconceptions about the nature of God's Kingdom. Some people believe that the Kingdom of God is the reward that the faithful will be offered when they die.

Others think that the Kingdom of God, is a bit like the age of Aquarius, for those of us brought up in the 1960's and 70's, a time of peace and free love for all.

But in reality, what is the Kingdom of God?

The kingdom of heaven began with the Baptism of Christ. The scriptures tell us that Christ immediately went forth and began preaching that the Kingdom of Heaven was near.

In fact, Jesus made the kingdom of heaven available through his teaching, through the forgiveness he offered and through his healing touch. But what was at the very heart of this kingdom?

Jesus was proclaiming a new way of thinking, and new way of entering into relationship with God.

Through our baptism we are part of God's kingdom, a kingdom which is far from complete, as we can see from the misery and sadness of the world. There is still so much that needs to be done in our world to bring about justice and peace for all, but that is what Jesus came to proclaim and that is the work he commands us to do.

Before Jesus left his disciples he commanded them "Go out into all the world to preach the good news and proclaim that the kingdom of God has come near." (That is what all Christians are called to do. Today Mutsa will be baptised and he will share with us the mission that all Christians have.)

But the question which is probably on your lips, even as I speak, is, "how do we do it?"

So often we think that we need to go and do great tasks, go as missionaries into Africa or to the pacific islands, become another Mother Teresa, this may well be the case for some people, but for others it is through the normal living of their daily lives.

Ron Del Bene was searching for answers in his life. Someone told him about a man in Los Angeles who has a reputation for being a very wise spiritual guide. On a business trip to California, Ron made an appointment to see this wise man whom he was sure could help him in his spiritual quest.

The day Ron was to meet the wise man he had a hard time concentrating on his business. All he could think about was the upcoming meeting with the one who surely had The Answer. He drove to the designated meeting point only to discover when he arrived that the man was not there. The longer he waited the angrier he became. Finally the man arrived. "I don't know which was greater, my anger or my disappointment," Ron remembers. "This short slightly built person didn't look at all like the wise man I had pictured. He didn't even have a beard!"

The wise man asked Ron why he had come to see him. For the next sixty minutes Ron poured out his hopes, fears, anxieties, and dreams. "Now," directed the wise man, "pay attention!" Ron thought perhaps the teacher would place his hands on his head or heart and he would explode in ecstasy. But he didn't. The wise teacher simply rattled off three things Ron should do. Before Ron had a chance to respond or ask any questions the Wise One left the room. Ron felt disappointed and disillusioned. He had travelled all that way and for what?

After Ron returned home his wife, Eleanor, asked him about his meeting with the Wise One. She listened intently to her husband's every word. "He told me that there are three things I must do," Ron said. "One, pray unceasingly. Two, go home and love my wife and children. Three, do what needs to be done."

Eleanor looked straight at Ron said, "Thank God, someone finally told you that!" What the teacher told Ron was true. "In retrospect," Ron writes, "the teacher was a far wiser man than I appreciated at the time."

When he least expected it, Ron made a great discovery. That discovery brought great joy. Such joy is a continuing possibility for those who open themselves to the kingdom of God.

We cannot of ourselves cure the problems of the world, though we might like to, we cannot bring peace and reconciliation to those areas of the world which are so troubled at this time, we cannot feed all the hungry, we cannot cure all the sick, there are limits to what we are able to do, but we must not let this prevent us from doing something to bring about change, we cannot allow the enormity of the world problems freeze us into inaction.

We can make a difference to the world, we can improve the lives of those around us, starting with our own families, we can work, as I know many of you do in community organisations that help to change people's lives, we can help support the Foodbank as it seeks to help the poorest in our community, we can assist overseas organisations like Worldvision as they reach out to the world's most needy. All of these help to bring about God's kingdom and improve the lives of God's people. We do not need to do big things all the time but we do need to be consistent in working to bring about change.

At the start of this sermon I asked the question, what is the kingdom of God? And the answer is you. You are the kingdom of God, you are signs of God's action, you are agents of his love, through the gift of the Holy Spirit given to you at baptism, you are God's new creation, bringing about his new creation, his kingdom.

As we hear St Paul say in our second reading this morning. 'We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.' You are called, you are called for his purpose and his purpose is to build a kingdom of love peace and freedom for all people.

