

# Weekly Newsletter for the The Parish of the Up Holland and Dalton



**St Thomas the Martyr Church**  
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Skelmersdale, Lancashire  
WN8 0ND



**Christ The Servant Church**  
Birkrig, Skelmersdale  
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**St Michael & All Angels Church**  
St Michael & All Angels,  
Higher Lane, Dalton,  
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## Welcome to the Parish of Up Holland Dalton

### Thought for today....

In today's Gospel we are given 5 parables about the 'kingdom of heaven.' The first is the parable of the mustard seed, which is a symbol of smallness and yet grows into the greatest of shrubs. This tiny seed grows so much that birds of the air are able to nest in its branches. Not only is this a sign of growth from small beginnings but also of hospitality. Every kind of bird is a symbol of all the nations. Though the kingdom is hidden and starts from what appears to be small beginnings, its growth potential is there - though we need to sow it.

It is the same way with yeast. It is amazing how a small amount of yeast can transform dull and heavy dough. The contrast between unleavened bread, which is hard like water biscuit, and leavened bread, which is soft and light, is due to the transforming power the yeast. Do we see the joy of sharing the transforming power of the kingdom? Yeast in the ancient world was usually added from on former batch of bread. Do we see how in each generation we have to hand on the transforming power of God? Let us remember the yeast is a disturbing element in the dough; it will not let it lie low but makes it rise and be active. There are times when we are called to disturb a situation that has become too dull and settled.

The hidden quality of the kingdom is shown in the next two parables. The treasure hidden in a field was lying there waiting to be discovered. It has her possibility of enriching life beyond the wildest dreams of the finder. He is willing to sell all that he has for it. Do we realise that it is well worth trading the temporal for the eternal? There is little use in treasure if we have lost our soul in the gaining of it.

The treasure was stumbled upon but the pearl was sought after. How much time do we spend seeking to enrich our lives with things of God? Is not some of the great discontent of our age due to the loss of our awareness of God's love and abiding presence? Surely we should be happy to give up minor treasures and beauty for the greatest beauty and treasure of all. Are you aware that many of our deepest longings are related to the call of God?

Like fishermen, we are always hauling into our lives things both good and bad. Once ashore, the

fishermen sort out their catch and the bad is thrown out. This takes discernment and practice.

Sometimes in our daily living we seem to have no discernment at all; we take on board the good and the bad and carry them around with us. To be part of God's kingdom we have to begin to get rid of all that is destructive or against the life in the kingdom.

Jesus asked: 'Have you understood this?' They answered, 'Yes' (Matthew 13:51)

How about you?

#### Questions to reflect on:

- Are you aware of the hidden work of God forever transforming our lives?
- Do you see that the kingdom needs your co-operation, your sowing and handing on?

#### **Our Churches are now OPEN for Sunday Worship**

**St Thomas the Martyr, Up Holland**  
**10.30am each Sunday**

**Christ the Servant, Digmoor**  
**10.30am each Sunday**

**St Michael & All Angels, Dalton**  
**11am each Sunday**

**Sunday Worship for the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity will be available from Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> July on our website: [www.uphollanddalton.org.uk](http://www.uphollanddalton.org.uk) Please tell family and friends.**

## PostScript: Challenges of the kingdom

Provided by Roots on the web

### Five stories to make us think (Matthew 13.31-33,44-52)

There are five parables (stories) about the kingdom in this week's reading which (unlike some others in this chapter of Matthew's Gospel) are not explained further. We are to make of them what we can. Remember that these stories were originally told to be heard, not to be read. Jesus uses images that people were meant to remember and go on thinking about.



Mustard seed, yeast, treasure, a merchant seeking pearls and a net – all these things illustrate 'the kingdom of heaven', says Jesus. The kingdom (or reign) of heaven (or God) is absolutely central to Jesus' teaching. Yet it is in many ways a puzzling as well as a secret kingdom; certainly, it is quite unlike the modern constitutional monarchy in which our British readers live.

Mustard seed is tiny but grows into a big shrub, even a tree. Yeast works away unseen until the bread rises. The surprise in these stories is not what the seed and the yeast do, for they are both familiar. The surprise is in the parallel which Jesus draws with the kingdom of heaven. Do these stories challenge us not to discount small and apparently inconspicuous things – for God's kingdom also has such small beginnings?

Those seeking pearls and treasure do not seem to want them for what they can buy. Indeed, it seems that they already have enough of the world's resources, for they sell things in order to possess the pearls/treasure. It is the intrinsic value of having them which attracts. Do these stories challenge us to seek the kingdom of heaven for its own sake, and not for what it will bring for us – or even for others?



Recent events (such as the death of Congressman John Lewis who worked with him) have reminded me of Martin Luther King. In 2017 I heard a sermon in which the Archbishop of Cape Town referred to the dream that Martin Luther King Junior had for his country, and went on to describe his own dream of a world in which 'all the narcissistic, nationalist, isolationist ramblings of our current times will disappear'. Thabo Makgoba went on to invite that huge congregation to help him realise that dream. Can we all share such a dream of the kingdom? And what might we do to help bring it about?

Much ink has been spilled on the notion of God's kingdom. Here are two points from leading modern writers on which we might usefully reflect:

- 'Through Jesus' life and teachings we see how the church came to understand that God's kingship and power consist not in coercion but in God's willingness to forgive and have mercy on us.' (Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 2003, page 85).
- Jesus' teaching on the kingdom is 'about God's sovereign, saving rule coming on earth as in heaven'; it is about rescue for the world not from the world. (Tom Wright. *How God became King*, 2012, page 242).

### Prayer

Jesus taught us to pray: Your kingdom come, your will be done.

Let us pray that in our lives God's kingdom may come – surprising like the mustard seed; and in secret like the yeast.

Let us pray that God's kingdom may seem to us as valuable as treasure or an expensive pearl.

Let us pray that we may be challenged, even in these strange times, to be committed to our part in bringing in God's kingdom, now and always. Amen.



### An activity to try!

You may well not have a mustard seed to hand; but perhaps you have some other seed ready to plant in the garden; or maybe you can find a seed in an apple or an orange, in a cucumber or a tomato. Put it in your hand and reflect on how any seed may be a sign of God's kingdom.

Find the most precious thing in your house and ask yourself what it is that makes it valuable to you, and in what ways God's kingdom is more (or less) precious to you.

*Dudley Coates is a Local Preacher in the Yeovil and Blackmore Vale Methodist Circuit and a former Vice President of the Methodist Conference.*

# Bible Study

***Even though restrictions are being lifted, many of us still have additional time on our own, why not try giving some time to reading and studying the Bible?***

## **A Prayer to start**

O God, mere words cannot convey  
what a privilege it is to be heirs to your kingdom.  
As I explore your word today,  
help me to learn about new treasures as well as old.  
May I see the amazing things you can do in my life.  
I am are part of your kingdom,  
and I come to you in awe and wonder. Amen.

## **Read the text**

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, sharing parts between several readers, or hearing it more than once using different versions, or using/adapting this suggestion.*

The passages to read are:

- 1 Kings 3.5-12;
- Romans 8.26-39;
- Matthew 13.31-33,44-52

*Take your time and re-read them, if you wish to.*

## **The Gospel**

Try to find the following things as pictures or the real thing: seeds in a bowl; a packet of yeast; a metal detector; a pearl necklace (real or fake); a small fishing net or similar. Look at each object as you read the relevant words from the reading which link to each of the objects:

- **Seeds:** '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.'
- **Yeast:** '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.'
- **Metal detector:** 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, that someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.'
- **Pearls:** '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.'
- **Net:** 'The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind.'

Enjoy reflecting on the words and thinking about each of the objects/pictures.

## **Explore and respond to the text**

*Read each bible reading, several times, then pause and just think of the words you have read. The read through the Bible notes (below) to help you reflect on each of the Bible readings.*

## **Bible notes**

### **Old Testament: 1 Kings 3.5-12**

Solomon was chosen and anointed king even before his father, David, died. Despite Solomon's practice of worshipping at 'the high places' (3.1-3), God appears to him in a dream and asks Solomon what he wants God to give him. His humility in asking for wisdom to govern and to tell what is right (v.9), rather than victories or riches, pleases God, who grants his request. God goes on to grant him other blessings on condition that Solomon continues to obey God's instructions for how to live (3.13-14). Sadly, we know that he failed to do this (1 Kings 11.1-13) and the united kingdom of Israel that he inherited fell apart when he died.

### **New Testament: Romans 8.26-39**

Paul introduces the concept of the Spirit as an intercessor for God's people, and he unpacks the idea that God works in everything that happens to believers. The predestination (v.29) spoken of here is a corporate one rather than individual: all those who respond to God's call are to be conformed to Christ, justified and glorified. The quotation of Psalm 44.22 (v.36) acknowledges that God's people are often facing hardship and death. Nevertheless, given the demonstration of God's love in Christ – who died and was raised – no forces or beings in the entire universe, even death itself, can separate believers from God.

### **Gospel: Matthew 13.31-33,44-52**

Here we have six parables concerning the kingdom of heaven. The proverbial smallness of the mustard seed (about 1mm), sometimes contrasted to a sizeable mustard bush (typically 2–3m tall), is referred to in other ancient writings (cf. Matthew 17.20). This comparison stresses that although the kingdom may currently appear insignificantly small, it will grow dramatically. Trees are used as

*Continues on next page.....*

## Bible Study

pictures of kings and their kingdoms elsewhere (cf. Ezekiel 31; Daniel 4), and it is thought that birds sometimes signified non-Jews. Jesus' use of the mustard seed as an image of the kingdom – rather than a more 'majestic' species – also draws attention to the unlikely beginnings of the kingdom: in Jesus' ministry of service rather than the work of a warrior king.

Yeast in dough (leaven) had to be cleaned out of Jewish houses before Passover (Exodus 12). It is sometimes used to picture the spread of negative things from a small start (e.g. 1 Corinthians 5.6-8). However, here it is used to demonstrate again the way the kingdom starts small but has a mighty and wide-ranging effect.

The next two parables (vv.44-46) both convey something of the huge value of the kingdom in comparison with anything else life might offer. They also both echo, from the mustard seed and yeast, the idea of the kingdom not being easily noticed at first glance. Pearls were more valuable than gold at that time.

The parable of the dragnet that indiscriminately catches fish, both good and bad, comes with an explanation. It is similar to the parable of the wheat and weeds (last week: Matthew 13.24-30) in speaking of the separation of good from evil that will happen at the end of the age, and of the persistence of evil agency until then. It is not clear if the net signifies the whole world (in which case the separation is between those who accepted the message of Christ and those who did not), or if it refers to the kingdom (in which case it might suggest a judgement of those who consider themselves members of the kingdom).

Finally, Jesus tells a parable about teachers within the kingdom. Scribes were those who interpreted God's instructions in the Scriptures in order that the people would know how to live God's way. This parable may indicate that, in the kingdom, those who have been trained in kingdom ways (as the disciples have) will draw on their Jewish heritage of knowing God's ways but also on the new things that Jesus is showing them.

### Links to consider between the lectionary readings

The reading from 1 Kings expresses a longing for God's guidance, to know God's will, in order to live well. Jesus speaks of the kingdom, rule, or will of God being accessible to those who seek it – although it may be costly to grasp. Paul unpacks how the Spirit of God guides believers in life and prayer because God loves them as adopted children who are being shaped into the image of Christ. The knowledge of God longed for in the Old Testament reading is shown to be accessible in Christ.

### Prayers

Lord, you took so much care to describe your kingdom  
in ways everyone could understand, including us.  
Your kingdom come, O Lord.  
Your will be done.

We pray today that you will pass on to us  
that gift of making ourselves accessible.  
Keep us  
from being a stumbling block to those who would seek you;  
from using language that puzzles;  
from actions that confuse;  
from anything that keeps us apart from your people around us.  
Your kingdom come, O Lord.  
Your will be done.  
Amen.

Lord, it's not up to us to sort the bad from the good,  
the wheat from the weeds.  
Rather, send us out to love everyone equally,  
and to do everything we can to promote your kingdom. Amen.

### Live your faith

Have a go at making some bread this week. As you add the yeast, thank God for his kingdom here on earth. If it turns out well, share your bread with some friends or neighbours.

# The Parish of Up Holland & Dalton

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### To arrange Baptisms, Weddings, Burial of Ashes etc

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 or visit our website and click on the appropriate link in the Life Events section.

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