

Vicar's Letter #15: 28 August, 2020
Our next sermon series, "The Kingdom of God"

Dear Parishioners

Just before our recent rise to Alert Level 2, we started a 3-week sermon series entitled "Hope for a wounded victor". In that series, preached both at St James's and at All Saints, we reflected on humanity's need for a Saviour, how a Saviour was promised by God, and how Jesus is the one who had been promised. Through his death on the cross he won our salvation, and was revealed as King and Lord of all.

Many people expressed their appreciation for this sermon series. It allowed a theme to be developed over more than one week, giving a picture of 'salvation history'. People also valued the booklet that Andy Spence produced, which opened up each week's topic with a reflection and questions. Andy's sermons were recorded and put on our website, so that people could reflect further by watching each sermon in the series.

This week we move to a new sermon series on "the Kingdom of God". As far as we can tell from the words of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, the kingdom of God (or "the kingdom of heaven" as we find it expressed in the Gospel of Matthew), was the topic that Jesus taught about most of all. This topic will be our focus in the Sundays up till Advent, which comes at the end of November this year. The series will talk about aspects of God's kingdom or reign, and the Bible text we will reflect on most will be the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12). We will be reflecting on God's purpose for human life, and how we open ourselves to that purpose and co-operate with it.

This time, instead of having the sermon series offered by only one person at St James's, there will be many different preachers. We plan for all of the 8am/10am sermons to be recorded on video and put on our parish website, and the sermon text will also be provided, so that people can easily review the teaching in the sermon. Once again, a booklet will be produced, containing a reflection and questions relating to each sermon topic. This will help us to engage with the sermon series both in our personal reflection and in our home churches. I plan for the booklet to be emailed to you with this Vicar's letter.

This sermon series, with the recorded sermons and the booklet, will help us to discover why Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of God most of all. It will also help us to keep building on our three key values of togetherness, discipleship and reaching the local community.

Whether or not we can meet together in our church buildings, we can grow in togetherness and discipleship of Jesus by taking this journey of reflection and learning as a parish. Under Alert Level 2 our home churches meet each week either by Zoom or in person. People keep on joining our existing home churches, and new ones start as well, so it is never too late to join. If you are not yet a member of a home church and would like to be, you are welcome to contact Guy Benton (tel. 020 41304283) or Andy Spence (tel. 021 2226474).

Finally, thinking about Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of God will also deepen our interaction with our local community. Jesus did not look for the kingdom of God only within synagogues and among religious people. He often found examples of God's kingdom in the ordinary people and activities of his day, and he celebrated the kingdom of God wherever he found it. Let us also be on the lookout for signs of God's kingdom around us and ready to respond to it.

May God's Spirit be at work in us and through us in the coming months, as we take this journey together.

With my prayers and warm greetings in Christ,

Peter Bengel

Vicar
(Anglican Parish of Lower Hutt)