

Sunday 26 July – Eighth Sunday after Trinity

Sermon by Christine Newmarch

An audio recording of the sermon from St Luke's will be available after the service at [Sermons \(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk\)](http://Sermons(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk))

In this morning's Gospel reading Jesus offers a number of snapshots to help us understand more about the nature of the kingdom of God.

At first glance they appear simple: a seed growing into a tree; yeast proving dough so that the bread will be delicious; but then he offers the more complex images of the treasure buried in the field, and a pearl of great value. Finally, he tells us that it can be compared to a net being thrown into the sea, and the judgement which is made between the good and the bad fish.

Common to each of these parables is the passage of time, of waiting. We often hear the kingdom as being both now and not yet. It is a testing concept, given to both reassure and to challenge.

To see the mustard seed grow into a tree we must wait. The way Jesus describes the seed growing into such a large tree seems to be both miraculous, and yet inevitable. It is the destiny of the mustard seed.

If you have ever made bread or done other kinds of yeast cookery, you will know how waiting is essential. The yeast will, given time, eventually pervade the entirety of the levain. It is unstoppable. If, like me, you have ever left dough to rise too long, and come back into the kitchen to find it taking over much of the kitchen, you can see its overwhelming power.

The growth of the mustard tree and the yeast speak somehow of how the indwelling of the Holy Spirit can be all pervading, all consuming. They depict a welling up of God within, working to fulfil God's purposes.

The man who found treasure in the field and the merchant finding a pearl of great value both had to wait too. We can only imagine how long it took the first man to arrange the sale of all his goods and to negotiate the purchase of the field. Then he was able to retrieve the treasure. Maybe this image reminds us of how the treasure of Jesus' identity was hidden from many people throughout his ministry. How they were expecting a very different Messiah, and how costly following him could become.

The pearl of great value was costly for the merchant too. He had sold all he had, and would never wish to be parted from this precious jewel. Here Jesus is telling his listeners how finding Him and God's kingdom is a life's work, unique and worth all we have too.

So here we are: waiting for the kingdom of God, knowing that it will come, and yet already being part of it, already enfolded in God's love.

St Paul tells us that all things work together for good for those who love God. He is describing a process, maybe a distant horizon so getting there requires both waiting and some work.

When Paul wrote these words he had already suffered imprisonment and beatings, and would soon do so again before being executed. He was not writing from a place of comfort. On the contrary he understood hardship and challenge at a deep level.

It was his faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus which helped him to look on his circumstances with hope, and an understanding of the God's love working within him, despite his suffering.

The reading from the first book of Kings tells us about the qualities needed for wisdom. When the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream and asked him what he would like, he did not come out with a typical wish list which we might write for Santa Claus(!), or for the unattractive qualities which we so often see being played out by influencers, politicians, or other authority figures.

Rather, Solomon grasped the enormity of the challenges ahead in leading God's people. In modern parlance we might say that he had a touch of 'imposter syndrome.' In this situation many might have asked for superpowers to keep people in line or make himself rich. But the Spirit of God working in him, giving his wisdom, led him to ask for the discernment, 'an understanding mind' to govern God's people, and to be able to discern between good and evil.

This pleased God, who values humility and service among his people.

Having patience, finding ways to be patient when we want instant results or urgent change, when we want the tree to grow faster, to find the bread to rise faster, to find the answer to difficult questions sooner – these all require humility, faith and trust.

In her book 'The Meaning is in the Waiting' theologian Paula Gooder tells us that:

'Jesus brings both completion and surprise in our waiting, and points to a life-long waiting, which can only be fulfilled in the end of all things.'

Meanwhile, we can look back to the good things we have received in the past and use them in God's service. We can also embrace new things, new ideas, new treasure to build our own faith journeys and to carry our church forward too.

As we seek the kingdom of God, we may find ourselves called to do all sorts of old and new things, like the master of a household Jesus described as bringing out of his treasure what is new and what is old.

Whatever the future may bring, may the power of God within us be as strong as the yeast in the dough. Let us also keep in mind St Paul's words as he reminds us to trust that all things do indeed work together for good for those who love God, from whose love nothing can separate us.

Amen.