

## Virtual Worship: Sunday July 26<sup>th</sup> 2020

### Glimpsing the Kingdom

Good morning everyone, and welcome to worship with the churches of Fleet URC and Beacon Hill URC. My name is Ruth Dillon and I am the minister of Fleet URC and Beacon Hill URC and I shall be leading us in worship. You are all most welcome.

Our opening words are from **Psalm 119 :129-135** and if you are able, and have a Bible to hand, I invite you to say these opening words with me.

*Your decrees are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them.  
The unfolding of your words gives light;  
it imparts understanding to the simple.*

*With open mouth I pant, because I long for your  
commandments.*

*Turn to me and be gracious to me,  
as is your custom toward those who love your name.*

*Keep my steps steady according to your promise,  
and never let iniquity have dominion over me.  
Redeem me from human oppression, that I may keep your  
precepts.*

*Make your face shine upon your servant,  
and teach me your statutes.*

The theme for today's service is '**Glimpsing the Kingdom**', and the different ways in which we understand the Kingdom of Heaven.

However, let us pause and put aside the distraction of the moment,

To be still before our God  
To abide in the shadow of God  
To be with the God in whom we trust.

### Call to worship

Leader: As we enter God's holy presence this morning,  
are you ready to hear again about God's kingdom?

**All: Come, open your hearts and minds  
to see the kingdom around us and within us.  
Come, and worship the living God. Amen.**

### Hymn

Seek ye first the kingdom of God  
And his righteousness;  
And all these things shall be added unto you,  
Allelu, alleluia!  
*Refrain: Alleluia, alleluia,  
Alleluia, allelu, alleluia.*

Ask, and it shall be given unto you,  
Seek, and ye shall find.  
Knock, and the door shall be opened unto you,  
Allelu, alleluia!... Refrain

You shall not live by bread alone,  
But by every word  
That proceeds from the mouth of the Lord,  
Allelu, alleluia!.... Refrain

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### Hymn of Adoration, Confession and Lord's Prayer

As we say our opening prayers, there is a response within our prayers of confession. When I say the words '**Forgive me Lord**', can you respond by saying '**as I open my heart to you**'.

.....

Marvellous and awesome Lord,  
we are forever grateful  
for all the good gifts you give us,  
for eyes to see,  
for ears to hear,  
for a brain to understand,  
and a heart to love.

Lord, mere words cannot convey  
what a privilege it is to be heirs to your kingdom.  
As we explore your word today,  
help us to learn about new treasures as well as old.  
May we see the amazing things you can do in our lives.  
We are part of your kingdom,  
and we come to you in awe and wonder.

Lord God, sometimes I feel so set in my ways.  
I'm not always ready to give something up,  
to gain the thing of value that you promise.  
Forgive me, Lord, **(response) as I open my heart to you.**

I want to keep my treasures locked up  
in a storeroom, safe from prying eyes.  
Forgive me, Lord, **(response) as I open my heart to you.**

Sometimes I just expect things on a plate.  
I'm not always ready to work for something  
that you call me to do.  
Forgive me, Lord, **(response) as I open my heart to you.**

I do want to be the yeast in my world;  
but I'm not always ready to be pummelled,  
or to give up my easy life.  
Forgive me, Lord, **(response) as I open my heart to you.**

Sometimes I take my eyes off you and feel so lost.  
Bring me back, please, Lord.  
Forgive me, Lord, **(response) as I open my heart to you.**

Help us, O Lord, to listen, to learn, to act and grow.

*And now let us be silent before God as we open our hearts to seek God's forgiveness.*

God in whom we live and move and have our being,  
Your tenderness and mercy surrounding us,  
and making us whole again -  
restored, forgiven and free.  
In your sight we are new creations,  
full of potential and  
Vessels of love.  
In Jesus' name we pray. *Amen*

And now let us say the prayer that Jesus taught his friends to say

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done,  
in earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those that trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever.  
*Amen.*

**Readings:** Now we shall hear today's readings.

They are

**I Kings 3: 5-12**, read by Neil Rorie

**Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-52**, read by Pam Hudson

### Reflection

There is so much richness in Jesus' teaching today and so many directions one could pursue as we seek to come to a deeper understanding of the Kingdom, the Reign of God. There are mustard seeds and yeast, discovered treasure and a pearl of great value and yes, there are fish of all sorts gathered and sorted. And oh, there is the master of the household finally sorting it all out, what is new and what is old.

Six parables concerning the Kingdom of Heaven, from the smallest, like the mustard seed growing to a sizable mustard bush, to the even smaller grain of yeast, in the midst of the dough, where we visibly see growth, and the effect the yeast has within the bread dough.

Both illustrations - and the other four parables in the readings - are used to demonstrate again the way the Kingdom starts small, but has a mighty and wide-ranging effect.

Parables convey what the Kingdom of Heaven is 'like' or 'similar to', and for me there are three distinct aspects to the Kingdom.

- **Firstly**, some parables are about the way **the Kingdom grows and spreads**. References to the mustard seed and yeast give us indication that the idea of the Kingdom is not easily noticed at first glance. Parables which suggest growth and flourishing stress that, although the Kingdom starts small, it will grow dramatically.

- **Secondly**, some parables stress that **the Kingdom is of more value than anything else life can bring**. Pearls were far more valuable than gold in Jesus time, and, for me, the Kingdom is about stopping and assessing and reflecting what is important and precious in our life. Are the goals we give ourselves goals to further the Kingdom or are they about our comfort and stability?
- **Thirdly**, and lastly, some parables are about the way the **Kingdom is a constant learning and changing environment**. Parables do not stop with Scripture, but parables are constantly being re-written and new illustrations emerge every day to illustrate the growth, value and flourishing of the Kingdom of God within every decade and country. Especially at this time of Covid 19, new parables of journeying and strength are uppermost in people's minds as a way of glimpsing the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God being accessible to those who seek it, although it may be costly to grasp - and how often is that true for us.

I know for myself, at the times when I have been at my lowest, when I have tried to find God and glimpse the Kingdom, it has been hard to see the Living Christ. Yet something happens to make me stop and reconsider: a conversation or unexpected phone call, a card through the post, a smile or a bird hopping on the grass, can all enable me to glimpse again the Kingdom of Heaven.

I am not good at glimpsing, for I like to see the complete picture. I like to know what I am facing, and yes, I can be impatient with my relationship with God. Yet isn't that being human, with all the frustrations that being human can bring? The journey we take to glimpse the Kingdom can be long and

arduous, or it can be here and gone from sight in a flash, in an instant!

We can only glimpse and imagine what the Kingdom of God will be like, for as Paul says, 'we only glimpse through a glass dimly but in time we shall see face to face'. Until that day, I invite you to consider which type of parable is suited to you and your personality at this moment in time: parables of growth, parables of value or parables of learning.

Remember though, we cannot do it all ourselves, we need the blessing of the Spirit to stay close to us. And when the curtain of life is finally drawn, may the complete Kingdom of God be revealed before us: a Kingdom of abundant growth, value beyond measure and of learning at the feet of Jesus.

### Prayers of Intercession

There is a response to our prayers of intercession today.  
When I say '**Your Kingdom come, O Lord**'  
Could you respond by saying, '**Thy will be done**'.

.....

God, who draws pictures in the sand,  
to understand your meaning through Stories and Parables,  
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 reveal the gift of generosity to those  
who hands are open, whether it be through word, or deed.  
Your Kingdom come, O Lord.  
**Your will be done.**

We pray that you will reveal your gift of hospitality to those who  
are desperate to receive a warm welcome and food to nourish  
them.

Your Kingdom come, O Lord.

**Your will be done.**

We pray that you would reveal your gift of trust  
to those who are needing to dig deep into their own resources,  
that may lean on you.

Your Kingdom come, O Lord.

**Your will be done.**

We pray that you will reveal your gift of strength  
to those who feel worn down, frayed at the edges and weary of  
change.

Your Kingdom come, O Lord.

**Your will be done.**

*In the silence, Lord, we pray for people and situations that we  
are aware of that are needing our prayers.*

Finally we pray for ourselves, Lord.

That a glimpse of the Kingdom may be seen in our lives,  
through our commitment, dedication and love for you.

*Amen*

## **Closing prayer**

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.**

## **Sung Blessing**

Blessing be yours  
from the God who gives Love,

Blessing be yours  
from the God who gives peace,

Blessing be yours  
from the God who gives Joy,

Blessing be yours  
from the One in Three.

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