

Ripon & Lower Dales

Worship at Home

30th July 2023

Hidden Treasures

By Kathy Lowrie, with thanks to Roots on the web

Call to Worship

We look for God in the dramatic.
We discover God in the ordinary.
Invited by God to slow down,
we freshly open our eyes to slowly see
God's life breaking into our awareness,
all around.

Hymn StF 706 Longing for light

1 Longing for light, we wait in
darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your Church gathered today.

2 Longing for peace, our world is
troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.

3 Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.

4 Longing for shelter, many are
homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone.

5 Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.

Bernadette Farrell (b. 1957)

Prayers of Praise, Adoration and Confession

Loving God,
thank you for the wonders of our vast
universe,
sustained and held in being by your
love.

Thank you for the tiny seeds nurtured
by earth,
that grow into great shrubs, where
creatures can shelter and feed.
Thank you for the barely visible yeast
that leavens flour for our bread.
Treasures that make life precious and
joyful.
Wisdom handed down to us, freshly
understood.
Your reign breaks in around us in so
many ways;
help us to see and rejoice.

Lord God, all time is in your hand,
unfolding;
we see so little of it in a lifetime,
yet sometimes it is overwhelming.
God of the kingdom of heaven,
you are our haven in life's storms,
our lifeline in calamity;
we watch and await your coming in
power.

Lord God, we thank you for sending
your son, Jesus,
for he teaches us the things that
matter, the things of true value.
We praise you that the treasures of
your kingdom are hidden beneath the
mundanity, and sometimes the drama,
of everyday life;
and that they are often there in small
ways that, if nurtured, grow in
abundance.
Thank you for your pearls of wisdom
and your seeds of faith.
Let your Kingdom grow among us.

Lord, we confess that the concerns of
the world weigh us down.
We worry about our needs, our wants,
how others perceive us.

We are so overwhelmed that we fail to riddle the gold from life's dross. We turn to you, seeking the assurance that your kingdom is with us and among us; help us to discern where it lies, so that we may turn our backs on all else. Grant us the patience to seek you and your ways with the forbearance you show as you wait for us.

Almighty God, although we take forever, you have forever – you are the God of Eternity. We are slow to seek you, slow to learn, slow to grow in faith; but when we are faltering, you wait sure and steady to forgive us; when we are lacking in trust, you forgive us and persist in working out your ways despite us. Thank you, O God of forgiveness and forbearance. Amen.

Bible Reading **Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-52**

³¹ He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."

³³ He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."

⁴⁴ "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then

in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

⁴⁷ "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸ When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹ "Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied.

⁵² He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

Reflection

This week's reading offers five images that challenge us to see the details of our ordinary lives in a kingdom perspective.

The mustard seed is tiny and easy to miss. But once it is sown, it is difficult to stop, because the seeds germinate almost at once. Jesus uses this parable as an image of God's reign of

love. Those tiny seeds become love germinating all over the place, relentless and unstoppable. What we must do is to wait and to trust, as our love for God grows steadily over time as we hear and study scripture to become that tall tree that can spread further seeds to be sown – and mustard can grow to 20ft/ 6m!

Yeast is a familiar ingredient when baking bread. The woman, here, is working with a huge amount of flour, perhaps Matthew wants us to recall the feasts that characterise the kingdom of heaven (e.g. 14:18-21). The amount of yeast is tiny, and it disappears into the flour as it is kneaded, and the dough takes time to rise – yet the baker can be confident that she will have bread to share. Once again love is spread and shared.

The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl focus on the value of the kingdom of heaven and the cost of gaining it. The workman – perhaps a hired day-labourer – risks all he has to profit from his life-changing discovery. The parable of the merchant - a person usually focused on making profit, sells all he has so he can buy the one most precious pearl. Jesus is saying, how much more should those who long for the kingdom commit to pursuing it. We have to let go of a lot of unnecessary baggage, our outworn attitudes, seek lesser priorities and enjoy the immense value of God's kingdom, already here in front of our noses. The reign of God becomes visible when people find what is most precious and important and live out of that truth. Such joy and love are contagious and healing. Like the image of the mustard seed germinating, growing and spreading God's love to others, what we do with the treasure we find can also help His kingdom to grow, so they too, set seed to germinate and grow.

The final parable suggests that the kingdom is a 'catch-all' net, where good and bad coexist – a reflection of the disciples' lived experience, then as now. It points to a future time when the kingdom will come fully and evil will be wiped out.

We are often too busy in our minds, hankering after an imagined past or worrying about a receding future. Instead, if we can trustfully arrive in this present moment, in not too much of a hurry, with not too much on our to do list, we can recognise the precious treasure of God's reign already offering itself to us.

Let us slow down enough, be attentive enough to recognise the pearl of great price is right beside us, the treasure in the field right here – and to know what is most important and precious in our lives.

Song **We seek your Kingdom**
Sung to the tune Eventide, "Abide with me"

We seek your kingdom throughout every sphere,
We long for heaven's demonstration here,
Jesus your light shine bright for all to see,
Transform, revive and heal society.

Before all things, in him all things were made,
Inspiring culture, media and trade,
May all our work serve your economy,
Transform, revive and heal society.

Peace, truth and justice reigning everywhere,
With us be present in our public square,
Fill all who lead with your integrity,
Transform, revive and heal society.

Forgive us Lord when we have not engaged.
Failing to scribe your heart on history's page,
Make us again what we were meant to be,
Transform, revive and heal society.

Faithful to govern, ever may we be,
Faithful in service, loving constantly,
In everything may your authority,
Transform, revive and heal society.
*Noel Robinson, Andy Flannagan, Graham Hunter. c2016
Downwardly mobile music.*

Prayer

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 confuses those searching for your wisdom;
from actions that do not show your loving and caring ways;
from anything that keeps us apart from your people around us.
Your kingdom come, O Lord.
Your will be done.
Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn StF 255 The kingdom of God

1 The kingdom of God is justice and joy,
for Jesus restores what sin would destroy ;
God's power and glory in Jesus we know,
and here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.

2 The kingdom of God is mercy and grace,
the prisoners are freed,
the sinners find place,
the outcast are welcomed
God's banquet to share,
and hope is awakened in place of despair.

3 The kingdom of God is challenge and choice,
believe the good news,
repent and rejoice !
His love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross,
our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.

4 God's kingdom is come,
the gift and the goal,
in Jesus begun,
in heaven made whole ;
the heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call,
and all things cry glory to God all in all !

Bryn Rees (1911–1983)

Sending out prayer (StF 493)

Come, Lord, to our souls come down,
through the gospel speaking ;
let your words, your cross and crown,
lighten all our seeking.

Drive out darkness from the heart,
banish pride and blindness ;
plant in every inward part
truthfulness and kindness.

Eyes be open, spirits stirred,
minds new truth receiving ;
stir us, Lord, by your own word ;
deepen our believing.

Loving God,
your kingdom is all around, for those with eyes to see.
May the light of your love be focused within us.
May we create space in our hearts to treasure it.
And may we be of service to your love,
now and always. **Amen.**