



# 'Worship at home' Sunday July 30<sup>th</sup> 2023



We come to worship God,  
who we find in the holy spaces  
and the ordinary places of our lives,  
as we live out the kingdom of heaven, here and now.

## Opening

Be silent,  
Be still, aware;  
For there  
In your own heart  
The Spirit  
Is at prayer;  
Listen and learn,  
Open and find,  
Heart-wisdom,  
Christ.



Photo: L Driver

~ <http://www.mallingabbey.org/index.html>

## What do you understand the Kingdom of heaven to be like?

Throughout the gospels, Jesus often speaks about the Kingdom of heaven: the phrase occurs more than 100 times in the New Testament, with almost all of these references as parables.



Parables have a way of drawing us into the story, inviting us to ask questions, and to discover for ourselves some new truth; about ourselves, about others, about God. Jesus was a master at telling stories, using ordinary, everyday situations to give his listeners a glimpse of what the Kingdom of heaven might be like.

*"Parables are stories about ordinary men and women who find in the midst of their everyday lives surprising things happening."* Sallie McFague Teselle in 'Parable, Metaphor, and Theology'

## **Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52**

*Jesus told them another parable: "The Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man takes a mustard seed and sows it in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it grows up, it is the biggest of all plants. It becomes a tree, so that birds come and make their nests in its branches."*



*Jesus told them still another parable: "The Kingdom of heaven is like this. A woman takes some yeast and mixes it with a bushel of flour until the whole batch of dough rises."*

*"The Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man happens to find a treasure hidden in a field. He covers it up again, and is so happy that he goes and sells everything he has, and then goes back and buys that field."*



*"Also, the Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man is looking for fine pearls, and when he finds one that is unusually fine, he goes and sells everything he has, and buys that pearl."*

*"Also, the Kingdom of heaven is like this. Some fishermen throw their net out in the lake and catch all kinds of fish. When the net is full, they pull it to shore and sit down to divide the fish: the good ones go into the buckets, the worthless ones are thrown away. It will be like this at the end of the age: the angels will go out and gather up the evil people from among the good and will throw them into the fiery furnace, where they will cry and gnash their teeth."*



*"Do you understand these things?" Jesus asked them. "Yes," they answered. So he replied, "This means, then, that every teacher of the Law who becomes a disciple in the Kingdom of heaven is like a homeowner who takes new and old things out of his storage room."*

When Jesus talked of the Kingdom of heaven, his listeners would have been expecting a transformation of life as they knew it. The Old Testament tells of the Jewish people waiting for a promised Messiah, a mighty warrior who would bring God's Kingdom, fulfilling the covenant where the Jews would live forever as God's chosen people. Instead, here was God's kingdom being expounded by a seemingly insignificant Jew from a poor family. Jesus' message of love and compassion, of turning the other cheek and paying the Roman Empire their dues, was a far cry from the mighty political power who was going to save the Jews from Roman oppression and bring their kingdom to reign. The Jews were waiting for a kingdom which looked like a mighty tree, but Jesus tells them to look for the seed.



These parables remind us that the Kingdom of heaven is about recognising God's presence in our midst, in the ordinary, everyday circumstances of our lives, here and now. We live in the Kingdom of heaven when we place Christ at the centre of our lives. The images used by Jesus would have been familiar to his listeners, reminding them that God is to be found in the everyday stuff of our lives.

### **We might use different images now: can you think of any?**

A grandma perseveres in talking with the lonely mum at playgroup, even though she finds it difficult to understand young mums these days.

A daughter gives up work to care for her aging mother at home.

A young man prayerfully commits the uncertainties of his work situation to God, trusting in God to lead him in right paths.

A young woman responds in love and graciousness to another who has hurt her deeply, rather than lashing out in anger.

A congregation courageously decides to close the doors on their aging building and join with a nearby congregation to form new connections and embrace new opportunities.

A six-year-old donates her birthday money to support the local food bank.

The Kingdom of heaven is not only something that we look forward to, but a state of being in which we live now, as we live our lives in God's truth. Each time we commit to following Jesus, each time we step out in love, each time we share the hope of the gospel or pray with another, we are living out the reality of the Kingdom of heaven.

The Kingdom of heaven is present where God is present. The Kingdom of heaven is within us and around us. As we live our lives of faith, as we show God's love for others, as we offer hope, and show God's grace, we are demonstrating that kingdom in action.

### **Closing**

We believe that in the kingdom of Heaven,  
Christ is with us, within us, beyond us.



The kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed;  
sown in apparent insignificance,  
growing into magnificence for the greening of the world.

The kingdom of Heaven is like yeast;  
incorporated in humble insignificance into the dough of life,  
expanding into enough bread for the world.

The kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure;  
lost and rendered insignificant under the ground,  
now found with joy and thanksgiving.

The kingdom of Heaven is like a pearl;  
all others become insignificant  
when the most beautiful jewel of all is found.

The kingdom of Heaven is like a net full of fish;  
where even insignificant sardines are saved  
and all the debris is tossed away.

We believe that in the kingdom of Heaven,  
Christ is with, within us, beyond us;  
and the meek and the poor, the merciful and the hungry,  
will rejoice with the angels of God.

May we indeed live as if this were so! - adapted from Bruce Prewer 4