

Thy Kingdom looks like what?

We are spending a second week with the topic

Thy Kingdom Come
Thy will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.

So a quick recap.

When we pray these words, we are (to quote the mission statement from my previous Diocese) Joining together in the transforming mission of God.

We are aligning ourselves with God's purpose and playing our part in the whole sweep of history from creation to the fulfilment of the new kingdom....which however you say it does seem cosmic and extraordinary.

But we are also praying that God's rule and reign comes into the very ordinary and even mundane aspects of our lives day by day and as we have just been encouraged to recognise that God, as our Father, adopts us and wants to heal a broken world.

The more I learn of the prayer, the more I find I can say these words when I'm not too certain what the next step should be. And I can use them to prevent myself from doing things to please myself and not serve the purpose of the kingdom.

I may think I know what we should do next...but praying these words is like a homing beacon keeping us on track.

When the world influences our thinking, our attitudes and our outlook, these words stand to correct us. What we seek is that what happens here on our bit of the earth, is the same as what happens in heaven. God's rule and reign.

Which brings us back to the nature of the kingdom of God. What IS God's kingdom like?

God's kingdom reflects God's character.

Do you remember that TV programme "through the keyhole". It started on TVAM in 1983 with David Frost as the host and Lloyd Grossman looking round someone's house...and guests had to guess whose house it was. The programme was still running last year.

Our homes say something about who we are and our character. My study currently suggests I don't tidy up very often.

If someone came into our house they would work out fairly quickly that one occupant is a clergyman and one occupant is a musician and teacher. They would probably realise another occupant is a student studying.

Would our home say something about our character though?

I think it would.

Above my desk is this picture. (*For readers – see the end*) It tells you that what I value and seek is peaceful silence. It makes more sense if you know that this quote comes from Martin Luther and is from his

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commentary on Zephaniah chapter 3 where it speaks of God's love and God singing over us.

The scripture and the commentary on it shape my understanding of God's kingdom. It's possible to have such faith in God and such a real experience of his love that we can be utterly at rest and have peaceful silence.

What would you say are the characteristics of God's Kingdom? What are the first things that come to mind?

I've already said they will be consistent with His character. What is important to you?

At our PCC away day earlier this month our first discussion for the day was about our values.

To prompt the discussion I listed four values that are of deep importance to me.

Freedom
Integrity
Transparency
Unity

The first comes to mind from the passage we had read from Luke chapter 4 and is foundational in my calling into ministry.

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,

to set the oppressed free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

God's kingdom is a place where there is freedom. *It was for freedom that Christ has set you free.* (Galatians 5:1) But it's not a freedom to indulge every whim and passion, it's the freedom that comes when you dwell in God's presence and under His rule and reign...and that was expressed in the Psalm we read.

I love those opening verses which include

³Trust in the Lord and do good;

⁴Take delight in the Lord,

⁵Commit your way to the Lord;

⁷Be still before the Lord

The other values compliment freedom. Freedom doesn't give permission to live any old how, there must be integrity. Our life of faith is lived 24/7 and is genuine. Our certainties and doubts, our joys and sorrows are not hidden but shape the faith we live and are reflected in the community we have.

The moment we fall into the trap of creating a one size fits all Christian culture is the moment we restrict freedom and the moment integrity starts to be tested. We feel we must appear to be the sort of Christian that fits at church instead of the real Christian we actually are.

Transparency and Unity hold hands. It's very difficult to be a united people where there are factions and schemes and plans hidden from the church community.

Believe me – I could go on about all these at length.

The PCC added their values to mine.

Grace, humility, trust, vulnerability, courage.

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These are the hallmarks we want to be observed by anyone stepping into our gatherings and all are consistent with God's word and His Kingdom.

It's easy to check out...

Can you give examples of these values in the life of Jesus?

You might argue over unity, because Jesus really upset the Jewish apple cart, but I would point to John 15. This is my command "love one another".

Our discussion will develop to put flesh on the bones of these values, and no doubt add to them. For example, freedom is expressed in our community by offering invitation rather than making demands or making people feel guilty or obliged.

Whether it's coming along on prayer day (assuming you are in the vicinity of church) or attending the prayer evening, or becoming someone who contributes financially, or if you are asked if you would like to help at the festival in September...it can only ever be an invitation otherwise what happens to the value of freedom?

The PCC discussion had already started to stray into the outworking of these values...a church that is nurturing, develops its relationships and prayer.

But thus far the greatest of these values is missing! Love. All our values flow from love, the love God has for us, the love we receive and the love we seek to share.

Another discussion topic for the PCC day was concerning mission statements and the most profound and simple suggestion was made.

Sharing God's love.

It is something we are doing and something we seek to do. I like it a great deal.

God's kingdom is a kingdom of love.

Our aim in discussing values was to be deliberate about how we understand and express God's Kingdom here at Holy Trinity. When we pray, your kingdom come, your will be done...we can be specific in our prayers for what that can look like here.

