

## Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

I love coming to this church. I've been here on Sundays when it's full of children, on Thursdays when it's more quiet and reflective. I've been here to worship and to do practical jobs like church cleaning or pick up something the children have left behind. When I open my curtains in the morning, the church is there and I pass it going to the shops and school. This church is very much a part of my life, a safe and steady presence in my sometimes chaotic life. I hope that everyone who comes here feels like this, whether you are just visiting, as some are today, or whether you have been coming for 60 or 70 years or more. Everyone should feel welcome and accepted, but I don't think everyone should feel comfortable.

Over the last few months I've been a bit disconcerted by a sign I keep seeing by the door at the back of church. This is a quote from Archbishop Justin Welby.

“This building should be a safe place to do risky things in Christ's service.”

I am not a great risk taker. Part of my job in Noah's Ark preschool involves being responsible for the health and safety of the 70 or so children who pass through each week. Risk assessments, policies and procedure play a prominent part in my working life and, whilst I do see risk as a good thing, it is also something to be measured and controlled.

The middle part of the Gospel reading today contains parables about two people who appear to have taken risks. One, found treasure in a field, hid it and then bought the field. The other, a merchant saw a pearl of great value. Both sold everything they had in order to possess what they had found. Both took risks. The owner of the field may have known of the treasure and removed it, something might have happened to the pearl. Both gave up everything they had to achieve their goal. These people appear to behave in a way that is both selfish and risky.

Whilst we might recognise this behaviour as very human, it seems odd in the light of other teachings of Jesus, which encourage us to share and give generously. The difference, I believe, is to do with what the pearl and the treasure represent. Jesus is not talking here about material goods or worldly wealth, but about the Kingdom of Heaven, or the Kingdom of God as it is referred to in other gospels.

### **So what do we mean by the Kingdom of Heaven?**

The disciples Jesus was talking to were expecting a Messiah, an anointed leader who would free them from Roman rule and raise a rich and powerful kingdom. But Jesus was not talking about this type of kingdom. The Kingdom of Heaven is not bound by time or space. It will spread far and wide like the mustard tree growing from a tiny seed, or like yeast working through dough. It is the place where God reigns and is recognized not by boundaries and borders, but by the fact that it is where God is placed first. One definition is that it is “God's way of doing things”

Later this morning we will welcome Sophia and Nathan into this kingdom. A glance at our reading from Romans will show us what an amazing place that is to be. As we go about our business in the Kingdom, we are assisted in our weakness by the Holy Spirit, who knows what we need even when we don't know ourselves. Jesus is speaking up for us in God's presence and, God is working for the good of those who love him. Put simply we are where we are meant to be in God's great scheme of things.

I should stress that we are not guaranteed an easy life, Paul refers us to threats of trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness danger and sword and I'm sure there are many more that apply to life in

the modern world. But by placing ourselves in God's kingdom we are in the best place to deal with them. It is for this that Jesus says we must be prepared to give up all that we have.

If, like me, you like chocolate, you could put it this way. You might be quite pleased to be given a Cadbury's selection box. But then someone says to you;

"If you give it all to me, I'll give you a hamper from Hotel Chocolat."

I don't know if you have been to Hotel Chocolat, but I can tell you, you would be more than happy to do the deal.

When you look at it this way the apparent risks taken by the treasure hunter and the merchant seem less of a concern. It's as though God has undertaken a cosmic risk assessment and said "It's ok. You can go ahead. I've got it covered."

As many of you know I have 5 children. Most of the time they are all very lovely, but it can be quite a challenge to get them all in the right place, at the right time and with the right kit. This is not helped by the fact that they all waste a lot of time and energy telling me that their siblings are not behaving as they should. I often find myself like a stuck record saying over and over again, "Just concentrate on what you have to do."

I believe these parables are Jesus' way of saying just that to us. He gives people permission to do something for themselves and confidence to take the risk and act promptly and decisively to make sure that the object they desire can be theirs.

### **So what risks might we take?**

This will be different for all of us. It may be something which seems very small. For some it may be as simple as coming through the door on a Sunday morning. It may involve taking on a different area of service in the church or outside it, or maybe you need to give something up and allow others a chance to do things differently.

Whatever it is I believe Jesus is telling us to take responsibility ourselves, don't wait for others to tell you what to do, don't hesitate because of doubts or raise obstacles and put things off.

The Commonwealth Games started this week which made me think of all the athletes who set their sights on a goal. They have to be focused and selfish in their training. Some will achieve it now, others at a later date. Some may learn from the experience and move on to other things.

So, as you walk past the message from our Archbishop this morning I encourage you to reflect on the Kingdom of Heaven and recall the slogan of a well-known sports brand.

"Just do it!"

Amen

Kathy Kilgour July 2014