

Sermon on Sunday 13 June 2021

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Readings: 1 Samuel 15: 34- 16:13 and Mark 4: 26-34

What on earth is happening to the world?



Have you ever experienced a moment when all you can see is humanity lurching from crisis point to crisis point? Leaders create division, populations are decimated by conflict, whilst events and diseases cause great suffering. At such times, many people of faith ask whether God is doing anything at all, and people who question the very existence of God can see such crises as proof that there is no God. It can look like humanity is doomed to failure, that there is no recipe for progress, no plan and no redemption.

Take the example of the reign of King Saul. You may know that the Hebrew people clamoured for a King to be like other peoples. Samuel - leader, priest and prophet of the people - anoints Saul to be king. The Bible paints a picture of a figure who looks to God and is at first successful in battle but who

then becomes corrupted by power, rules unjustly, is disobedient to God and jealous of men. God wants to work with Saul to build up his people, but Saul turns away from God creating enemies in all directions. Division, conflict, chaos and death all follow as a result. A pretty appalling mess. So, what happened? Did God fall asleep? Or get it wrong?

Firstly, we have to reflect on how God works: **God works in partnership with us.** In this case, God gives the people a king in the end because they ask for one. He sends Samuel to support Saul, but Saul rejects Samuel and no longer chooses to depend on God for his strength.

Secondly, **God has not lost hope or changed his intention for humanity; God is faithful forever.** He is steadfast in bringing his people back to him. God intervenes, by sending Samuel to anoint a new King whilst Saul is still alive. Samuel is told to go to the family of Jesse the Bethlehemite. Jesse has seven sons. One by one they are perceived not to be the chosen one. The youngest son, David, is not even there; he is tending the sheep. We might argue that someone has to tend the sheep, but there would have been others to do the job as well. David is simply too young. The choice of David goes against the expectations of a culture where elder brothers take precedence in status and responsibility. Third note to ourselves: **God's plan is not always, if ever, how we would plan to achieve our aims.**

The Jewish people all knew God would send them the Messiah (the Anointed One), chosen to bring in God's kingdom, but who knew this Messiah was going to be a baby born into an ordinary family, would grow up to be a carpenter, was the Son of God but would gain victory over death by dying on a

cross? How many realised that his ministry on earth would not usher in a geographical kingdom constructed of material wealth and military force, but instead concern the actual rule of God in people's hearts and minds.

Mark's Gospel is written as a response to the Good News of Jesus in the context of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. How should the followers of Jesus respond to the crisis of the day and the issues it brings? Mark's answer is for Christians to take up their cross and proclaim clearly and fearlessly that Jesus is the Son of God and has risen. God's plan is still being completed.... This Good News of love and forgiveness will spread. The kingdom of God or **the time when God's will, will be done on earth as in heaven, is really coming.**

Be reassured; in today's Gospel the power that propels the coming of the Kingdom of God is not of our own. In the first parable, it's described, 'As if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, **he does not know how**'. In the second, 'It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is **the smallest of all the seeds on earth**'. Its capacity for growth is a creative power beyond humans and its ability to provide a place of shelter and nurture for living beings goes beyond the input of human beings.

Again, in both parables, there is a lot of waiting. In the first, the growth does not happen all at once but instead in stages and in the second, the seed starts very small as if nothing will happen. **It all happens in God's time! Humans sow the seed, share the love and Good News of Jesus, but we must wait and trust, too.**

So, on those days when the world seems more than a little mad and is overtaken by a major crisis, when things seem not to get better, when we ask how it could be possible that God's Kingdom is coming and will come - remember. The spiritual realm **is** breaking through and the world **is** being transformed through Jesus' ministry, death, resurrection and the working of the Holy Spirit.

How is it happening? God is asking us to work in partnership with Him. He is asking us to share God's love wherever we are in our society. Not to think it will happen in our own time, but in God's time. Not to rely on our own strength like Saul, but to turn in prayer and rely on God's strength. Not to give up because it looks like nothing is happening, but to trust that God's power is working. To wait, hope and trust that as the seed is planted, shoots of new faith germinate and mature, God's vision for the world will become reality. He is asking us to welcome our fellow human beings into the shelter and nurture of a community based on the love of Jesus. No pandemic can stop this happening.

If you still want to ask: But, when will it happen? How long will this go on for? When will God's kingdom be complete? I just don't know - but I do know that it has been happening ever since Jesus began that earthly ministry in Galilee and it is happening now in the place where we live.