

Section B - Biblical Sources and Theological Matters

This section covers an overview of the Biblical texts from which we derive the Kingdom paradigm, focussing mainly upon the Gospels. We also take a more thematic view of the Old Testament and the way that the early church seemed to be living out the Kingdom as derived from Paul's letters to the churches. There is some guidance on how Kingdom themes can be incorporated into sermons for the liturgical calendar, and a short Writing Group piece on how we understand the cross.

B1. The Biblical Sources for Kingdom Evangelism

Richard Firth and John Vincent with Erica Dunmow

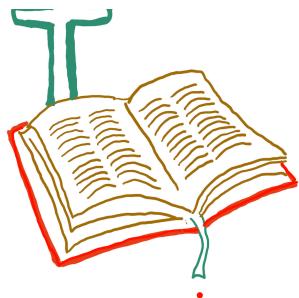
The word Kingdom (basileia in Greek), which is key in much of Jesus' teaching, does not occur in the Old Testament. It means the rule or reign, or sovereignty, of God. It is characterised by the parallelism in the Lord's Prayer: Your Kingdom come Your will be done on earth, as in heaven.

However, the Old Testament does establish that God is a King, generally seen in an exclusive sense of being a King for the Israelite/Judean people, where God is their defender against other peoples and their gods.

1. THE OLD TESTAMENT

God in the Old Testament is described as King of Israel (Deut 33:25, Jdg 6:3, Is 43:15), whose throne of David is God's seat (II Chron 17:14, 28:5, 39:11).

The coming 'Day of the Lord' would re-establish Israel/Judah, and bring in a time of everlasting peace, of justice and mercy; which would also involve other nations (Amos 2:4-3:2). The prophets foresaw this 'Day of the Lord' (Jer 30:3, Ezek 37:15-72, Dan 2:44).



The nature of God's realm is usually seen in particular actions or activities which manifest God's presence, rather than in 'spiritual' attitudes. God is known to people by actions. The Torah is basically God's actions described, for human imitation.

The nature of God as King is explored in many places in the Psalms. They are written after the period when Israel itself had successfully petitioned God to have an anointed ruler who

would lead, and to some extent have power over, people, as opposed to a judge who had wisdom to adjudicate between people.

The realm of God is seen as universal in many passages eg: Ps 8:1, Ps 22:28, Ps 26:1, Ps 47, Ps 96, Ps 99:1- 4, but also particular to the Israelites: eg: Ps 21, Ps 44:4-8, Ps 105, Ps 136. In terms of the Project's understanding we follow the inclusive and universal understanding of God's realm.

2. THE NEW TESTAMENT

Here the Kingdom concept is established as the core of Jesus' message. Jesus teaches in the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke that following Him involves completely forsaking a previous lifestyle and embarking upon a new way of being and living. Through living in that Way (the term that John's Gospel prefers to Kingdom) disciples are embodying God's realm.

3. THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Jesus' Work

Mark's Gospel opens: "Here begins the Good News of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God," and goes on: "Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the Good News of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come. Change yourselves, and trust yourselves to the Good News." (Mk 1:14)

The word 'Gospel' is a secular word used at the beginning of decrees of information, sent out by a Roman emperor. So here, Mark announces his divine proclamation of Jesus - the Messiah/Christ for the Jews and the Divine Son for the Gentiles.

Immediately, the actions of Jesus indicate his status and authority. He casts out demons, heals a leper, cures illnesses, and forgives sins - all of them divine activities (Mk 1:21-28).

Disciples

At the same time, Jesus begins to get together his 'troops', his fellow workers, his companions, his disciples. "Jesus said to them: Come with me, and I will make you fishers of people." (Mk 1:19). In Mark 2 the doors of discipleship are opened to tax collectors and sinners; Levi, son of Alphaeus, is called (Mk 2:14). "Many bad characters sat with him and his disciples - for they were numerous." (Mk 2:15).

The lines are clearly drawn - the 'Kingdom celebrators' on the one hand, and the doctors of the Law, who were Pharisees, on the other hand (Mk 2:15).

From this point, disciples become fellow-workers, co-healers, co-proclaimers. "He appointed twelve as his companions, whom he would send out to preach the Gospel, with a commission to drive out devils." (Mk 3:14-15).

When Jesus is 'alone', he has disciples with him (Mk 4:10). Nowhere is there any content for the preaching, either for Jesus or for the disciples. The reason is that in Mark's Gospel there is only one message - that of Mark 1:14: "Behold, the time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God has arrived. Change yourselves, and trust yourselves to the Good News."

Discipleship is thus identification with Jesus, going with him, doing what he does (healing, exorcism), saying what he says - the standard Kingdom proclamation.

The final commission in the disputed ending of this Gospel - Mark 16:15 "And [Jesus] said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation." – is a clear evangelistic injunction that has universal consequences. In becoming disciples,

people can respond to the Kingdom, just as they can with Jesus. Evangelism is the good news of God's realm and its presence is now available to all.

4. THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

At the same time as Mark was writing, around CE 66-69, (we give the dates because of references to the Jewish War of Independence, CE 65-70), we can imagine another group producing a different Gospel. They wanted to write not so much a Gospel of Action, like Mark, but rather to put together some of the Sayings of Jesus. We call their work Q (from German, Quelle), and it was the document which Luke and Matthew put beside Mark's Gospel and one or two unique pieces, as they wrote.

Luke's Gospel begins with poor people - priests working in the temple, Joseph and Mary, shepherds, old people, a prophet, the slaughtered children (Lk 1-2). Then John the Baptist appears (Lk 3:1). John announces the 'Good News' (Lk 3:18). Then Jesus, around thirty years old, begins his ministry with the temptations (Lk 3:23-4:13). Finally, Jesus returns to Galilee and declares in the synagogue:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Lk 4:18-19).

Luke's Gospel tells stories of how Jesus himself embodied actions that put all this into practice. Jesus is *autobasileia* - the Kingdom in himself (Origen, CE 250).

The passage from which Jesus quoted was Isaiah 61:1-2. But the historical thread to which it gives witness is that of the Jubilee - the feast of every 49th year, as in Leviticus 25. The Jubilee Day declares:

- Release for each community member from debt (Lev 25:35-42)
- Return of appropriated or forfeited land to its original owners (25:13, 25-38)
- Freedom for any who had become slaves (27:47-55)

The result is a 'Jubilee Community'. "Blessed are the poor - the Kingdom of God is yours!" (Lk 6:20).



The conclusion is that the whole legislation of Leviticus 25 constitutes a striking challenge from the point of view of practice. Obvious problems are that slavery ends every seventh year, and that debt and land ownership reversals are possible under Sabbath rules.² What a place to begin Kingdom of God practice! The Kingdom is the Jubilee for all!

When the twelve disciples are sent out on the first, internal, evangelistic journey, their injunction was to "proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal." (Mark 6:7f). Right from the outset, the word and the deed meant that the Kingdom values were enacted and not just spoken. Likewise the seventy sent out as proclaimers for Jesus' work in the wider area (Luke 10:1-11) were instructed to give peace and to announce that the Kingdom is coming near to the towns, whether they were welcoming of the idea or not.

The words of Commission in Luke 24:47 are that "repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in {Jesus'} name to all nations", one of the passages that clearly points to

the worldwide rather than exclusively Israelite nature of the Kingdom, which compelled the first evangelistic diaspora of Christians.

5. MATTHEW'S GOSPEL AND THE KINGDOM PARABLES

See separate Study of the Kingdom Parables in Matthew's Gospel by Andrew Crowley

6. THE JOHANNINE TRADITION

The Johannine tradition complements that of the Synoptics by describing the company of the disciples as part of His “flock”, that is the caring company of his disciples. Of himself as its shepherd Jesus says, “The sheep follow him because they know his voice.” (Jn. 10:4) “My sheep listen to my voice, I know them and they follow Me” (Jn 10:27). John’s Gospel also emphasises the Way of Jesus. Kingdom language is less explicit, but we can, by linking it with the Synoptic Gospels, see that The Way is the pattern of life that God as sovereign sets out for us to follow.

This following involves a life of service:

“Whoever wants to serve me must follow me, so that my servant will be with me where I am.” (Jn 12:26). This is illustrated by the incident of the foot-washing in the upper room: “I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you.” (Jn 13:15). Following also involves a life of obedience. In the Synoptics Matthew 28:21 links the making of disciples with the need for them to obey all that Jesus has commanded. This is expressed, presumably in the two great commandments: to love God with heart, soul, mind and strength and neighbour as oneself, coupled with the further rider to love those who are enemy. (Mk 12:28-31; Lk 10:27; Mt. 5:44), which is complemented by Jn 13:34, “Now I give you a new commandment; love one another”.

Obedience, in Christ’s mind and in the Kingdom of God, is successor to Old Testament expectations, those of obedience to the Ten Commandments and to the binding terms of the Covenant, in which a faithful God expects a consequent faithfulness and obedience from his people.

The establishment of the New Covenant in Christ’s blood, as initiated in the institution of the Lord’s Supper (Holy Communion) in the upper room, means that for disciples obedience is implicit in this new state of affairs. “And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples” (Jn 13:34f), words which express the inextricable link between following, obedience and evangelical witness and service.



For true disciples of Jesus, ‘Following’ also implies that there is a ‘Way’ to be followed. The Old Testament hope was that there would be a historical personage, as anticipated by Isaiah, whose ministry it was to prepare the way for the coming of One who was to be ‘The Way’. So John the Baptist announced: “Prepare the way of the Lord and level out the road for him to travel.” (Mk 1:3, Is 40:3-5). The Gospel writer then attributes an astounding claim to Jesus himself:
“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life”. (Jn 14:6).

7. OTHER VIEWS OF THE KINGDOM

As a very small footnote, it is worth remarking that Satan claims kingly power over all earthly kingdoms (Lk 4:5-6), and to being the ruler of the world (John 1:31, 14.30).

8. ACTS

The members of the Early Church were known as “followers of the Way” (Acts 9:2) for it was as such that Saul of Tarsus persecuted them. Other references substantiate the description (Acts 18:24f; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14) which persisted into the first few centuries of Church history.

‘Followers of the Way’ is still a valid descriptive phrase of Christians today. It expresses a truth born of experience in that ‘to follow’ involves both an initial decision of the will and then a determined persistence to continue on the path. The word ‘journey’ also comes to mind, that of progressing onwards through life, ever willing to learn through new insights and experiences, pressing on to that maturity of faith to which we are all called, whilst on the journey being a good neighbour to others in various aspects of Christian service and witness, joining in the struggle for justice, freedom and peace in the world at large.

Evangelism consists of inviting others to join in the journey, accepting them as they are, recognising and using their gifts as they are able to contribute, and involving them in the growth of the Kingdom of God, God’s Domain.

How you can take part in this work

1. Contributions

We welcome additions to this resource, which will be available as a website which can include sound files.

Please email your piece to office@utusheffield.org.uk by 1 November for consideration by the Writing Group.

2. Seminar/support group

The Writing Group recognises that some ministers who come from this perspective can feel very isolated and/or frustrated that their understanding of what is Good News and how to share it is not valued by colleagues.

We are looking to hold an online get-together to share ideas, encouragement and prayer, some of which might become items for the website if people want that, quarterly on Monday afternoons for 1 1/4 hour. Please check dates and book via office@utusheffield.org.uk and help shape how this develops.

B2. A Review of the References to the kingdom in Matthew's Gospel

Andrew Crowley

METHODOLOGY

I read through Matthew's Gospel, taking note of the references to the word 'Kingdom'. My purpose was to get as broad a view as possible of the notion of the Kingdom, and to see if there was a bigger picture that we might miss if we only look at particular references or parables.

I noted all the references and at a later date reviewed them to identify any characteristics. I have listed the references below and against each have tried to summarise the key characteristic being portrayed. I have made a conclusion which may be helpful when we convey the Kingdom to others.

Reference	Text	Characteristics
3:2	<i>Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is close at hand.</i>	It is near to us; accessible; not far away
6:9 – 10	<i>Our Father in heaven, may your name be held holy, your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven</i>	We yearn for it
7:21	<i>It is not the person who says Lord, Lord who will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father</i>	Open to <u>all</u> who do the will of the Father
11:11	<i>In truth I tell you, of all the children born to women, there has never been anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. Since John the Baptist came, after this present time, the Kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence taking it by storm.</i>	Prophetic
12:25	<i>Knowing what was in their minds he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is heading for ruin;"</i>	A warning

13:18	<i>So pay attention to the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the Kingdom without understanding it the evil one comes and carries off a person in his heart: this is the seed sown on the edge of the path.</i>	The Father's generous invitation
13:24	<i>He put another parable before them, "The Kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everyone was asleep his enemy came, sowed darnel among the wheat and made off</i>	Living in the world
13:31	<i>The Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it is grown it is the biggest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air can come and shelter in its branches.</i>	Life giving
13:33	<i>The Kingdom of heaven is like yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour til it was leavened all through</i>	Contains a dynamic for life
13:37-43	<i>An explanation of parable of the darnel.</i>	
13:44	<i>The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in the field which someone has found</i>	To be discovered
13:45	<i>The Kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls</i>	To be longed for
13:47	<i>The Kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that is cast in the sea and brings in all kinds of fish</i>	For all people
13:52	<i>Every scribe who becomes a disciple of the Kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom new things as well as old</i>	Bigger than us; our vocation

16:17	<i>...and the gates of the underworld can never overpower it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven</i>	The church's responsibility for the Kingdom
18:1	<i>The disciples said, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?" So he called the little child to him whom he sat among them. Then he said, "In truth I tell you unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven. And so, the one who makes himself as little as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven."</i>	Humility and trusting
19:12	<i>There are eunuchs who have made themselves so for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven.</i>	Radical lifestyle
19:23	<i>In truth I tell you, it is hard for someone rich to enter the Kingdom of heaven. Yes I tell you again it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the Kingdom of heaven</i>	Countercultural, becoming poor in spirit
20:1	<i>Now the Kingdom of heaven is like a landowner going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard</i>	Generosity/Invitation/Life giving
21	<i>(The entrance into Jerusalem.) Look your King is approaching humble and riding on a donkey.</i>	Jesus as King
21:43	<i>I tell you then that the Kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to people who will produce its fruit</i>	Fruitful/Life giving
22:1	<i>Jesus began to speak to them in parables. "Again the Kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a feast for his son's wedding. He sent his servants to call those who have been invited, but they would not come</i>	Invitation for all

23:13	<p><i>Alas for you, Scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You shut up the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces, neither going in yourselves nor allowing others to go in who want to</i></p>	<p>A warning for church leaders and ministers!</p>
25:1f	<p><i>The Kingdom of heaven will be like this: Ten wedding attendants took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom ...</i></p>	<p>Be alert to the signs and possibilities</p>
25:31	<p><i>When the Son of Man comes in his glory, escorted by his angels, then he will take his seat on his throne of glory ...</i></p>	<p>The way to salvation for ourselves by what we do, <u>and</u> for the world in the way it treats Christians</p>

COMMENTS

The Kingdom references suggest that there is a range of different characteristics:

- The Kingdom is close, and we are all invited to it.
- The Kingdom is life-giving and dynamic.
- The Kingdom is open to all.
- The Kingdom is something we yearn for, that will satisfy our hearts.
- The Kingdom is demanding of us.
- Being in the Kingdom requires a new way of living, of being prophetic, humble, and poor in spirit.
- The Kingdom places a big responsibility on us.
- The Kingdom is not ours, it belongs to the Father.

I was struck by the opening of Chapter 21 (entry into Jerusalem). At first sight this did not seem to convey much about Kingdom, but later on it became clear that this was a powerful image of the Kingdom (an echo of Zechariah 9:9). Jesus is portrayed as the King, entering Jerusalem in meekness, heralding peace, a servant to all, faithful to his Father, ushering in a Kingdom of joy and peace. If this is what his Kingdom looks like, how do we convey this to others?

We want to see this grow.

Contact office@utusheffield.org.uk to contribute or to take part in the supportive quarterly seminar series.

B3. Thematic Old Testament Resources for Kingdom Evangelism

Rachma Abbott

Christian missional focus tends to draw on New Testament resources. The Hebrew Scriptures are the greater proportion of our bibles and they were sufficient to prepare the way to Jesus both as spiritual resource, guide to ethical living and writings of the promise of God. However, Christians, even long-serving faithful members of churches, can often lack confidence in the articulation of their own spiritual lives of faith and in their bible knowledge.

I hope this piece might help people see that the “Old” Testament provides foundations, depth and support to a richer understanding and usage of the New(er) Testament and for our own writing of our lives, by the grace and gift of the Holy Spirit into the currently being written testaments of faith.

This is a very swift and erratic drone flight across the riches and resources of the Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament to see:

1. Awareness of what and where there might be scriptural resources for Kingdom Evangelism
2. Broader arcs of meaning (metanarratives) that might be a support to Kingdom Evangelism
3. Challenges that the Old Testament poses for us and ways of looking at this.

1. AWARENESS

Within the Christian tradition of many church members, the Old Testament comes closest to being a natural part of their worshipping inheritance. Through stories of individuals, predominantly among the narratives of the patriarchs in Genesis and Exodus; through a sense of the fulfilment of prophetic voices, in particular Isaiah, not least in the liturgies of Advent and Handel’s Messiah; through the Book of Psalms, especially as they have been influential on our hymns, songs and prayers. Isaiah is sometimes referred to as the Fifth Gospel and plays a role as the foundational scripture for Jesus’ Nazareth Manifesto and the Psalms are the most quoted and referenced part of New Testament writings.

This has often been influenced by fragmented telling and retelling of stories of individuals within Sunday Schools, Open the Book, musicals, cinema, etc. Fragmented because the offering of these stories for children means they often lose aspects that add ambiguity to these stories of the heroes of the faith.

Noah’s ark and its rainbow is often a story that children and adults know (sometimes unaware that it is a biblical narrative) but the complex legacy of the stories after the flood with Ham and Canaan and the use and misuse of alcohol does not, as far as I know, exist in picture book format.

Moses begins in the basket of bullrushes and leads the people of Israel from slavery to freedom, but we hear less often of his murder of the Egyptian or of his willingness to work with people from other religious traditions to explore how to serve people well. David's story is almost always the story of David and Goliath, not of David and Absalom, even less often of David and Tamar or Abigail.

The place of these stories in religious education in schools, and the reminder that many of these stories are shared in some form with Jews and Muslims, offers a resource in multiple ways. They can be the beginning of conversations of presence and engagement. They remind us that, dramatic as the differences that may have arisen, there is a shared foundation which can assist us in shared community work.

A long-held aspect of mission that still has worth and value has been the testimony of individuals' faith journeys. Biblical stories of faith heroes give a context for the

interweaving of our own faith stories. The more complicated aspects can offer enrichment and a reminder that God works with the failing as well as the holy hero, often in the same person. As we learn less familiar narratives of escape from oppression and freedom in God we can find that they speak into modern contexts of the possibilities and places of redemption. Jael and Sisera, within the narratives of Deborah in Judges, offer powerful ways to speak of God in action in a situation of sexual exploitation and domestic abuse.



abuse. The uncomfortable stories many can offer people a place in which their experiences, which may feel unspeakable, are shown to be joined into the narrative of God's ongoing working out of compassion and judgement with mercy and transformation.

It is worth noticing that many stories in the Old Testament show God working with individuals and cultural contexts that are not those of the people of Israel – Joseph works with the frameworks of Pharonic Egypt for the betterment of the people of Israel as well as the tribes of Jacob. Moses works with the Midianite priest Jethro. Daniel works with the rules of Babylon in the Exile. This should encourage us in activities around justice and community engagement that God works with people outside of the faith community, and we should too. This includes living out our lives of faith with and for people of other faith and cultural habits and practices – the promise of Jubilee, practises of using garments as surety and celebrations are clearly mandated to include slaves and sojourners i.e. outsiders as well as insiders. Inclusion in mission is often seen as starting with the Ethiopian eunuch – the narratives of the Hebrew Scriptures show us that people who remain outside of the faith are inside God's loving purposes, including God's loving purposes for his people.

2. BROADER AREAS OF MEANING AND NARRATIVE

Kingdom

What does the Kingdom look like? In the New(er) Testament, the new heaven and the new earth crystallise in a heavenly city. In the Old(er), but still current for Christian faith, Hebrew Scriptures the new heaven and the new earth are expressed in images of

abundant agricultural growth and harvest and the promise that those who plant will get to enjoy their fruit (Isaiah 55:1-54, Isaiah 65:17-25). This is alongside the peaceable kingdom where wolves and lambs lie down or feed together and the snake's poison can no longer injure a small child (Isaiah 11:6-9, Isaiah 65:25 and by contrast in Isaiah 5).

Kingdom as a single word may not be easily found in the Hebrew writings of the Old Testament but concepts that enrich our understanding of what this might mean are underpinned within these scriptures. Ideas such as the anointed one (messiah); the narrative arc of Davidic kingship including the implicit criticism of those who choose kingship like other peoples in the kingship story of Saul; and in the place and promise of land.

There is an additional depth to these ideas in the metaphorical uses of the Shepherd, closely linked to political and religious power and leadership in both Jewish and Christian traditions. For Christians this is deepened in the rich ambiguity of a Jesus who is both Shepherd and sacrificial lamb (Isaiah 53:4-7; Psalm 23; John 10).

Call and Task for the whole community

The narrative of Abram begins with God's call – a call that leads to change, physical journeying alongside spiritual and faith transformation and a place where the promise can be fulfilled. Samuel's call happens within the religious context but comes from beyond the religious leadership. Although Samuel needs Eli's support with discernment, the vocation to mission and evangelism is God's call. As in Isaiah, it begins with a message of challenge to religious and political authority that is hard. For both Abraham and Samuel there are times when others play a role which may be supportive or otherwise (Hannah, Hagar, Sarah) and when outsiders may provide the nudge which moves us back into line with God's path (e.g. Abram, Sarai, Pharaoh).

Alongside call and task for individuals, the Hebrew scriptures remind us time and again that there is a collective and communal nature to vocation. The vocation to freedom during the years in the wilderness makes clear that there is difference in understanding where God is, or even that God is in these experiences. There is no suggestion that Moses should stop working with the people – even though he sometimes finds that possibility appealing!

The call and activity of the community also needs evangelism that brings the Kingdom closer. The realisation of the good news isn't only when it is taken on board by individuals. These narratives may encourage us to live and work with people without expecting a complete unity of purpose – Sarai laughs but provides the meal. Hagar sees God even in her exclusion. Hannah's fulfilment is in letting go of Samuel so he can travel his own journey.

Prophetic Lives of Holiness

Throughout the writings of the prophets there is a reminder that our lives need to be lived as people who work to overturn injustice, and who do not use the patterns and rituals of our faith to evade the need to care for widows and orphans over our religious respectability. There is in Amos a reminder of the gifts of those who haven't been 'bred for' religious leadership. There is a willingness to offer hard truths to insiders about the failure to lead lives of commitment to God. Although our activity in seeking and working

for justice for the poor should be rooted in our sense of what it is to follow Jesus, there is nothing in the prophets that limits the recipients of justice to insiders. No farmer or landowner should be able to read the passages of Isaiah with wolves and lambs cohabiting without being aware of the challenge this is to the status quo of hierarchies and established practices – it is a radical reordering of how we know things to be. The danger implicit in wolves and leopards should encourage us to be engaging with whatever might be profoundly other to us. There is a radical inclusivity in these images.



3. CHALLENGES

Separation or inclusion

The Hebrew Scriptures offer an ongoing challenge to our tendency to either/or polarities – in the beginning God made the heavens and the earth. Western Christianity has often postulated these as opposites - heaven v earth - but the Hebrew pattern in language terms has used pairings of opposites to emphasise inclusion and totality. God's making of the heavens and the earth is not the creation of two destinations for the human being but a reminder that all was under the sovereignty of God. Christian evangelism has sometimes majored on sin and forgiveness – Kingdom evangelism will need to recover the language of original goodness from our readings of Genesis, and to notice the radical nature of this in the context of a people who have in exile encountered Babylonian and Sumerian creation stories, and chosen not battle but unity and inclusion as the model for expressing their understanding of God.

I think that in Genesis there is a similar parallel that can be drawn from a translation of Genesis 1:27 as “male and female created they it” that recognises that there was a similar unity in the human creature, encompassing rather than polarising gender and sexuality.

Our surroundings

Images of a new heaven and a new earth in the New Testament also speak of a city, a new Jerusalem. The imagery and narratives of Zion and Jerusalem are rich and complex in the Hebrew Scriptures. The poet William Blake imagines his Jerusalem as a contrast between the dark satanic mills and the green and pleasant land. The idea of pastoral idyll is still a deeply held mythology in the cultural life of this nation.

What might both a new and old heaven and earth offer Kingdom evangelism? Are there ways in which Kingdom grows from ideas about the nature of the land?

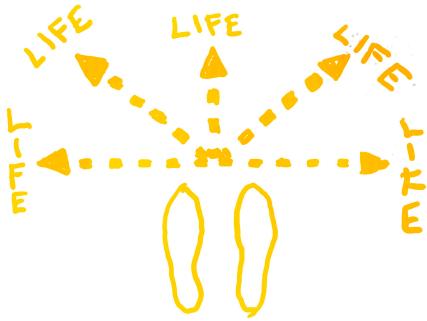
During Covid-19 the place of outdoor access has been shown to have mental and physical health benefits, has been the place of encounter when indoors has not been accessible to people, and the spaces of freedom and stretch for those in urban constraint.

Issues around the environment/creation continue to be important aspects of shared action for justice and the imperfect betterment of our current situations. Land use relates to housing as well as green spaces. The place of food (food banks, feasting, coffee mornings, interfaith gatherings such as iftar meals, harvest suppers) is profoundly

connected to land. In many rural settings, access will require a new movement to give fair access to footpaths, as in the past on Kinder Scout.

Making choices

Throughout Exodus, and implicit in the writings of the prophets, is a call to choose. If we believe our own choices of faith have shaped us, there is a balance to be found in respecting individual pathways, that may include other and no faith choices, with offering opportunities to choose and follow Jesus.



The biblical injunction in the Hebrew Scriptures is always to ‘choose life’: an important key to Kingdom evangelism is to offer life as the choice, rather than death as the outcome of failing to choose what we offer. The perpetual reoffering, in the Old Testament narratives, of further and deeper ways to redeem failure and offer the choice of life afresh, should energise us to work actively but with patience, and allow choices to be regularly offered and repeatedly rejected without losing heart in either the value of the offer or the value of continuing to work with those who may be other from our perspectives of faith.

B4. Location, Location, Listening and Learning: New Testament Letters to Communities

Rachma Abbott

The focus of this section is on the lessons that might be found for Kingdom Evangelism from listening to the letters that Paul, and possibly some others, wrote to communities that are named, and so connected with specific places. If we think about ourselves as locally resident communities that want and need to become Kingdom Evangelists, we may no longer be expecting or relying on visiting evangelists. Can we learn how to enact and proclaim Kingdom Evangelism from considering the communities who received these letters, and does this help us to imagine what Kingdom Evangelism might look like in our local contexts, delivered and received by and among us?

I am indebted to my Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible for some of the background I offer here. I am reading scripture as a parish-based priest (Church of England, currently rural), and so as a practitioner who is committed to the importance of mission as a local, context driven activity. For biblical scholarship and detail on the disagreements and discussions within these letters you will need to go elsewhere!

In terms of Kingdom Evangelism and the calling to missional proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ, the letters offer a glimpse of diverse and distinctive Christian communities in development. None of these communities could, in those early days, be considered established or institutional churches. Place, ethnicity, faith, class, and culture provide context to the issues that Paul and the other evangelists found. The letters' specific application to particular communities should encourage us to develop evangelism and respond to what is local and specific in our own contexts.

It can be useful to remind ourselves that the order of these places in a bible contents page is often the reverse of the order of the missionary journeys that Paul undertook, and which gave him reason to write to them. I have, for convenience, tackled them in their NRSV biblical order.



When the letters were written all of these communities were new, small and developing in terms of Christian identity, many were house churches – an encouragement for anyone facing small, fragile projects, or working with people in the early stages of discipleship or on the fringes of faith and encounter with God. For this reason, I have referred to them as Jesus followers, rather than as Christians.

1. ROME AND THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

The letter to the Romans was sent in advance of Paul's arrival there, and so was to a community he knew by repute/hearsay. It was of course the capital city and seat of the Empire, but this community was very much on the fringes of political and economic power.

Many of the Jesus followers had been within the Jewish communities of Rome. Disputes between groups of Jews including disputes about Jesus (but probably, given the differences between Pharisees and Sadducees in the biblical record, about much else as well) led to the emperor Claudius expelling the Jews from Rome, some of whom, including Priscilla and Aquila, later returned after significant encounters with groups of Jesus followers elsewhere. The Jesus followers that remained in Rome were therefore newer to an encounter with the stories of Jesus, and may not all have had experience of, or familiarity with, the Hebrew scriptures and Jewish traditions of monotheism, dietary practice, etc. The challenge of those called to lead communities (who were still relatively new Jesus followers themselves) and then to integrate the returnees, led to disputes about relationships.

The integration of these groups gives a context of change, perhaps in worship as well as in culture, that may be very familiar to us. Economic and other aspects of insecurity, the experience of migration, the nostalgia for return, coupled with the discovery that the church and its community are not as they remembered, and the reminder that these communities remained on the fringes of the ‘Rome’ of power (although impacted by the decisions of Emperors), made for psychological fragility and fractiousness.

The challenge of balancing evangelism with a church forming cultural groupings that can easily become factions, of pastoral care for both new members and old stalwarts, and the legacy of the impact of the decisions of a distant government on a local people are not unknown contexts for our own day. The several house churches implied in this letter may hearten those juggling ecumenical or multiple church settings now. Paul’s challenge to the weak and the strong in this letter has this context.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What issues of both new and established connections impact the proclamation of the Good News in your context?
2. Where are strengths and weaknesses in your congregation? (You might consider this in terms of newness to faith, the neighbourhood or connections to power and wealth).
3. How might “good news” be different for migrant communities, returning residents, or for those ‘pushed out’ of community in your location?
4. How can you support young (whether in faith commitment, knowledge, or age) leaders to be nurtured and enabled? Is this always at the expense of elders?

2. CORINTH AND TWO LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIANS

Corinth was reputed to be the richest port and the largest city as well as the capital of its province. It was possible for some to achieve significant wealth and social mobility.

The seaside city and gateway to trade was also known to be a place of sex workers, migration and blocks of flats filled with the poor who included escaped and freed slaves. No doubt, as in the seaside towns of our own context (such as Blackpool, Morecambe, Penzance, Brighton), for some, work was seasonal, open to exploitation, and poorly paid. For others, the city was a place of leisure, recreation and the ease of being away from the constraints of home. The gulf between the successful, well educated, the newly wealthy, and those from the “other side of the harbour” offered both resource, opportunity, and potential for growth and for conflict. Some of the negative descriptions of Corinth in terms

of sexual behaviour may have been influenced by regional prejudices or stereotypes. The reality that the Jesus followers could only meet together in homes that belonged to the wealthy may have kept the contrast and challenge of their diversity highly visible as they learned to live and worship together.

These letters are clearly written to multiple groupings and are responses to failures and breakdowns in relating together. The letters also hold three of the most powerful and well known of Paul's calls to how to proclaim the good news:

1. The cross (1 Corinthians 1) is presented as a complex and difficult issue to understand: folly to Jesus followers among the Gentile, predominantly Greek, communities; a stumbling block to Jesus followers of Jewish communities; and as something which, transformed by vocation, faith and the experience of spiritual/mystical encounter, can have a profoundly transformative and different impact on people.
2. The body, both its gifting and its brokenness, as the gathering of Jesus followers and its perfection in the resurrection body of Jesus himself (1 Cor 12).
3. The primacy of Love as the focus for proclaiming the good news (1 Cor 13).

Among the ideas about how people come to faith is a sequence of 'belong, believe, behave'. It may be worth noting that the dispersed groups of Jesus followers in Corinth are all treated as if belonging and believing can be taken for granted (although with some matters to reflect on – such as Chloe's people/'I belong to Apollos', etc), and the focus is on how they can behave across their diversity in worship, background, economic status, ethnicity etc in order to share and experience their gifts together.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. If proclaiming the good news should be spoken from love, then relationship is key to earning permission to speak about Jesus. Where in your context do relationships need to be repaired, built, or enabled, so that love can be the driving force for evangelism?
2. Note: ideas around relationship may be a useful reminder why for some people it is important to speak not only of Kingdom, but also of kin'dom (in addition to its referents in feminist theologies).
3. Across the Jesus followers of Corinth there are groupings living very different lives and worshipping in a variety of ways – this isn't always easy. How can you work with difference within Jesus followers in your context to live out the good news for your communities?
4. Where do different groups in your community sit on the 'belong, believe, behave' spectrum? How does this affect the way in which you share the Gospel with them?

3. GALATIA AND THEIR LETTER

It seems that the Jesus followers in Galatia (modern day Turkey) were predominantly from pagan backgrounds (Galatians 4:8), and the letter was written in response to the arrival or presence of Jesus followers from Jewish backgrounds, who were desiring conformity to Jewish practices, specifically circumcision. The letter's beautiful and most well-known

passages (Galatians 3:25ff; Galatians 5:21) have an emphasis on freedom, the Holy Spirit and faith as a gift which should not be undermined by coercion around cultural practices.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What work on racial justice, cultural awareness and self-awareness (about our own prejudices in those seeking to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ) might be influenced helpfully by the reminder that Paul desires the Jesus followers in Galatia to be freed from cultural impositions of practice, tradition and the customs of different Jewish backgrounds?
2. It is worth noting that the Galatian Jesus followers need to be encouraged to have confidence in their own faith, giftings and vocations. Do those from UKME/ GMH/ BAME* in your context need to be doubly encouraged to share these gifts, especially if they feel vulnerable to culture oppression?

4. EPHESUS, PHILIPPI, COLOSSAE: THREE LETTERS

I have taken these three letters together for two main reasons – some scholars suggest these weren't written by Paul himself, but if so, all three were written by him from a place of imprisonment or (in the letter to Colossians) 'suffering'. The fact that when he wrote these letters, Paul's travelling ministry of evangelism was constrained, offers a possible explanation of the change in tone.

Ephesus was famously a place of significant craft and skill in the production of sculpture and idols. Colossae is about one hundred miles to the east of Ephesus.

The two cities seem to have been places of pilgrimage, trade and mixed populations in terms of ethnicity and culture, although Colossae was no longer as wealthy and successful as it had been. By contrast Philippi, in Macedonia, was the first community of Jesus followers that Paul established in Europe. All three communities seem to have been primarily gentile in culture, although the cultures of each city would not have been the same. All three of these letters seem rooted in gratitude for the faith of these communities and to highlight Paul's prayer – praise and constant intercession are hallmarks of the opening chapters of each letter. There is also a shift to a more public encouragement of those who are exercising leadership and sharing in the proclamation of the good news of the Kingdom of God, e.g. Philippians 4:2ff, Colossians 4:15ff, Ephesians 6:10ff. All three letters have liturgical and/or theological content: Ephesians (throughout), Philippians, most famously in chapter 2, and Colossians in 1:15-20 and Chapter 3.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Paul's time in prison seems to have given him space for depth and reflection in both intercession and theological teaching in these letters. What space do you give to intercession as part of your proclamation of the good news in your setting, and where might there be a need or an opportunity to teach aspects of the faith such as the incarnation?
2. Are you developing new leaders from a range of backgrounds, ethnicities and cultures to sustain the work of proclamation of the good news?

5. THESSALONICA AND TWO CHURCHES

Thessalonica was a large Roman city, capital of the province of Macedonia. It was significant for both its Balkan trade routes and Mediterranean Sea routes. The Jesus followers were predominantly Greek hand workers and tradespeople: “the lack of reference to slaves or slave owners indicate a congregation of predominantly of low but free social standing(Robert K Jewett on the letter in Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible editors James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, a book to which I am generally indebted). Paul both asks for economic support for this community of Jesus followers and encourages others not to belittle those who work with their hands, 1 Thess 5:12. It may be that these concerns for both financial help and respect for working people are useful reminders to us that social justice is a necessary element of proclamation of the good news. Paul’s own experience of handwork (2 Thess 3:7) gives encouragement to those in voluntary and self-supporting ministries and should encourage institutional churches to recognise and encourage vocations both from and within such communities.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians speak clearly about end times and the second coming of Jesus. What impact does the urgency of the evangelistic task shown here have on your own work?
2. Are there similarities or differences in the communities that are poor or hand workers in your own context? What work might you be called to do alongside them as part of proclamation?

The remaining New Testament letters both the Pastoral Epistles and those named for other senders are not covered in this article. The writing group hope to add resources to this over time.

We want to see this grow.

Contact office@utusheffield.org.uk to contribute or to take part in the supportive quarterly seminar series.

B5. The Faithfulness of Jesus

Richard Atkinson

Steve Chalke's recent book, *The Lost Message of Paul*¹ invites the reader to hear afresh the voice of St Paul. Open about the fact that he is drawing on the writings and insights of others, Chalke uses their material to debunk Paul as "the author of structural social inclusion". Instead, he describes Paul as "a revolutionary who saw a new inclusive world dawning and gave his life to help bring it in"².

Asking us to scrape away the accretions of Christian history and scholarship over the centuries that have hidden and distorted the words of this first century Jew, and to revisit the original texts, Chalke revisits several central Pauline themes. For instance, the 'Wrath of God' is not about God ferociously angry at the sin of humankind, but rather a Biblical revelation of a God "who is taken aback, troubled, pained and broken with sorrow by our rebellion and rejection of his ways"³. It is the God of love who knows the cost of loving us, as so brilliantly expressed in William Vanstone's hymn,

'Morning Glory, starlit sky':
 Open are the gifts of God,
 gifts of love to mind and sense;
 hidden is love's agony,
 love's endeavour, love's expense."⁴

But amidst the revisiting of original sin, the meaning of the cross, the nature of salvation and so much more, each re-examined against the belief that God is love, there is one theme that stands out as we explore the relationship of evangelism and the Kingdom. It is what is meant and implied by the word *pistis*.



Traditionally in many churches the translation has been 'faith'. The reference is to our faith in God, that essential precursor to salvation. Saved 'by faith alone' salvation is, in part, what we do. "It all boils down to your ability to believe; to muster the right thoughts, enough of the right thoughts, and with the right intensity"⁵. This, suggests Chalke, is a mistaken translation.

Building on the insights of E P Sanders and others, Chalke invites us to translate *pistis* as 'faithfulness'. Referring, for instance, to Romans 3:21-22, he notes that even Tyndale, despite his backing for so many aspects of the theology of Luther and others who made 'faith' paramount, translated *pistis Christou* as 'the faith of Jesus Christ' rather than 'faith in Christ'. A similar issue of translation exists with Philippians 3:9, which in the King James Version is translated as "through the faith of Christ" rather than 'through faith in Christ'. He refers to Tom Wright's assessment "When Paul speaks in Galatians and Romans of *pistis Christou*, he normally intends to denote the faithfulness of the Messiah

to the purposes of God rather than the faith by which Jew and Gentile alike believe the gospel ..."⁶.

For Chalke this ‘changes everything’. “If pistis is ‘faithfulness’, it is of a different nature from ‘faith’. It is a firm commitment to a narrative or story in which you live – whatever you may feel or believe at any particular moment in time”⁷.

The story is now about the faithfulness of Christ. His willingness to live a life of love, of sacrifice, of obedience, whatever the cost. It is about the crucified and risen Lord. It is the gospel invitation to walk with Christ, to take our cross and follow, always knowing that whatever our doubt and times of faithlessness, God remains faithful in his love for us.

For our theme of Kingdom and evangelism, it asserts that what is the heart of discipleship is God’s love for us, that love that is so beautifully described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 and elsewhere, and our readiness to live within that faithfulness and to invite others to journey with us. The self-giving love that is the essence of the topsy-turvy Kingdom of God, is the discipleship we are to inhabit. As Chalke summarises, ‘Biblical ‘faith’ is not an intellectual assent to a concept, a commitment to a set of doctrines and theories, or a mystical sense of peace and well-being. Instead it is a risky commitment to a radical way of living; a call to action, a way of walking, a summons to loyalty and allegiance. This, only this, is pistis.’⁸

Introducing this exploration of the nature of pistis, Chalke refers to the life of Anjezë Bojaxhiu. Better known as Mother Teresa of Calcutta, she was, in her lifetime, the epitome of Christian faith and service. After her death, much of her private correspondence emerged, which revealed that for fifty years she had struggled with faith, often feeling cut off from God. At times, she even doubted the existence of God. For some, this suggested she was a fraud, for others, more importantly, this reflected her journey with Christ, a Lord who was eternally faithful to her in his love. Were it a matter of her ‘faith’, then it is a sad situation, but under the ‘faithfulness’ of Jesus she was able to live faithfully. She contributed to the Kingdom and certainly invited others to walk the Way.

Towards the very end of the book, Steve Chalke writes of how we are to collaborate in the extension of the Kingdom. It is not, he says, that we are waiting for God to act, but rather that the faithful God is waiting for us to collaborate in the agenda of righteousness and justice. The ‘faithfulness’ of God, the pistis of Christ, puts the Kingdom right at the heart of all we do, not least inviting others to walk with us in faith and discipleship.

B6. Kin'dom-based Seasonal Themes for Speaking Good News, and Sermon Points

Erica Dunmow

The way the following seasonal themes have been approached is to search for those elements that:

- speak of hope and joy
- give a message that will lift up people who feel lowly
- give a sense of possibility to people who feel powerless
- are included as forgiven agents as well as recipients of the Kingdom and are sisters and brothers in and to Christ.

This is fed by a prayerful engagement with the Biblical text – searching, through the Holy Spirit, for what reflects the God I love and trust as a bringer of justice and reconciliation to Godself and between humanity. Occasionally they derive from renewed study of the language of the text where a traditional reading leads to something that is oppressive. Sometimes they stem from the learning of scholars and sometimes from discussion and reflection over the years.

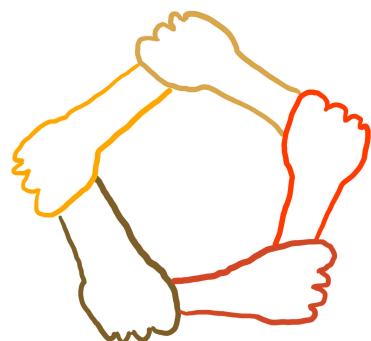
As most of this has been done as a practitioner, there has been little noting of sources along the way, so I both give thanks to those whose work I have built upon, and apologise that they are not properly acknowledged.

1. ADVENT

If you follow the traditional pattern for the Sundays in Advent, there are lots of good kin'dom readings and points of connection with the themes. There are usually several good Advent campaigns by charities and other networks that can be supported as an accompaniment to a daily Advent calendar window, which can speak into the kin'dom of justice.

The people of God

This week focuses on how we as the people of God engage with the world around us in service and in peace and justice issues. The Exodus narrative of liberation is helpful. This sort of theme can draw in people who themselves have a concern for the common good.



The prophets

There are lots of kin'dom themes throughout the Prophets, and it is good to pick up on the images of God which demonstrate the nature of Jesus' reign – he is a wonderful counsellor, not a controlling dictator, a Prince of Peace and not a mighty warrior.

John the Baptist

The metanoia – repentance – John calls for is actually a turning of direction of travel for one's life to face the way that is kin'dom congruent and Christ accompanying. As well as personal behaviour, this can be the collective behaviour of the congregation, to urge a more outward facing, social holiness and faith-sharing approach.

Mary

Preach on the Magnificat in Luke: Mary is not just a passive bearer of God-with-us but an active participant in the kin'dom enterprise which is one of empowerment and subversion of the order based on greed and selfishness. A parallel can be drawn between other significant leaders and the influence of female nurturers in their political and theological upbringing.

There is also the theme of the trustworthiness of humanity to encompass and carry God in vulnerability.

2. CHRISTMAS

The key theme here is that of incarnation: God's self-emptying to become as divine as can be in a human being. This is again about trusting human processes, and in pretty inauspicious circumstances.

The Christmas Eve Evening Service can be a good one to reflect on how God makes good and can transform apparently messy and chaotic circumstances. This can chime with the lives of those who feel hopeless. Mary would not have planned the birth to take place in such a way – we do not know whether she was able to pack whatever she had laid aside for the new-born, and she would be missing her cousin Elizabeth and probably there was no birth support woman present either. But despite all the messiness of human reality the child is born, the angels do sing, the shepherds do come.

The disreputability of 1st century Palestinian shepherds is much better known now, but always worth stressing – it can be the poorest and neediest people who are first to respond to the needs of others.

The gift of God breaking into the world and the possibility of the kin'dom being known on earth is an important one to put against the acquisition of gifts. Encourage the congregation to be hopeful and joyful about the nature of the King who has been born.

3. COVENANT

If this service is to be observed at the start of the Methodist Church/calendar year, then the nature of our relationship with the King who can be trusted and whose kin'dom is one of life and hope is a possible theme. The shift from God's promise in the OT of the future nation to its leader-to-be, Abram, to Moses the leader making the covenant with God on behalf of his people, to us all making our individual covenants, is congruent with the expansion that Jesus, and then Paul, make to the Kingdom concept. It is no longer a national particularity but a universal, where all are equal children and inheritors of God, and able to make a personal and collective response to God's promise.

The Covenant Prayer in the Methodist tradition demands a response not just of faith, but of a faith that underpins an immersive commitment to discipleship, trusting in the promises God has made and responding to the "call to love and serve God in all our life and work" (Methodist Worship Book, Introduction to Covenant Promise, p287) and thus join in with kin'dom expansion.

4. EPIPHANY

The key kin'dom theme here is that of inclusion, in the revelation to the Gentiles. The recognition of the Christ as the coming Messiah is first acknowledged in a theological

way by a number of outsiders from other countries, who are most likely not Jewish. This tells us that people who are not followers of Jesus can receive revelation from God and of God without first being believers, and can come to worship too. This does not detract from Jesus' mission of salvation, because that is an event without time, the impact of which is once and for all (as Paul has it) and therefore is not bound by linear history or spatial geography.

In the Orthodox tradition and some European countries, this is the day for present-giving because we are giving back to the Christ we see in others.

5. CANDLEMAS AND THE PRESENTATION OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

This is the third occasion when prophetic words about Jesus are spoken by devout people. Both Simeon, a righteous resident of Jerusalem, and Anna, a prophet who lived in the Temple, have longed for the coming of the one who will bring about the consolation of Israel (although the Messiah is not named as such in the Luke passage). Both are inspired to recognise in the infant Jesus that he is the one, and importantly Simeon, as with Elizabeth and Mary before him, declares the universality of the light of revelation to the Gentiles, which will reflect well upon Israel. The Kingdom, although centred in one place and people, is for the benefit of all.

6. JESUS' BAPTISM

As with the birth narrative, this is an instance of the human side of Jesus – he wants and maybe needs to be alongside us in his need for connection to God. Coming after his temptations, it is the moment where he seals his commitment to leaving aside miraculous support and living in a human way, with human limitations. That act, for him, will be a turning in the direction of a tough path. It will be one of self-emptying to be alongside people, one of challenging authorities through debate and humour rather than violence, and of submitting to injustice, torture and death with remarkable quiet dignity and forgiveness. This is the kin'dom approach that God wishes for the wonderful Counsellor, the Prince of Peace.



The London East Ender in me loves the translation (Mark 1: 11, NRSV) which has the voice of God saying that he is ‘well pleased’ with his beloved Son. What a wonderful endorsement at a point of probable loneliness. And the kin'dom evangelism message says that those who also turn to walk in a Godly direction, in Jesus pattern, can also hear God’s voice speaking that love and endorsement to them.

The descent of the dove is often seen as the presence of the Holy Spirit as encourager and guide - again a gift promised to those who choose to follow Jesus on the kin'dom way.

7. MOTHERING SUNDAY

If Mary as the archetypal mother is preached, then make sure you look at her probable influence on the young Jesus - the singer of the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) would clearly have communicated that aspect of her vision to her son. It is a foundational document in the New Testament kin'dom understanding, which preludes Jesus' own sermon based on

Isaiah 61:1-2 in Luke 4:16-21. Her willingness, as with every birth mother, to endure the pain of childbirth for the goal of new life, can be drawn as a parallel to Christ's willingness to endure torture and death for our rebirth and reconciliation with God.

The mothering aspects of the nature of God tie in with the kin'dom paradigm's inclusivity - if male and female are made in God's image (Gen 1:27) then the female must be found in God.

8. HOLY WEEK

1. Palm Sunday

The key kin'dom point here is the nature of the kingship of Jesus, his accessibility to the ordinary people who fete him because of what he has done for them. How might our churches be viewed by the local community – are we a group of people that engages in local issues, and blesses and celebrates the other organisations who also serve the common good in our area? Would the local community come out to celebrate our churches?

2. Maundy Thursday, Last Supper

The foot-washing and the servant-kingship emphasised in Matthew and John are good points for raising the nature of the King who leads the kin'dom. We are not to lord it over each other and we are not to jostle for prime positions. It is both heartening (in terms of a shared fallibility with the disciples) and salutary (in terms of the fact that we always need to guard against drifting into worldly patterns of power-over) that the disciples still need to hear this, so close to the end of Jesus' time with them. Jesus' knowledge of, and continued hospitality to, Judas the betrayer are points of contact for people who feel they want to hide their true selves from God and also fear they are not good enough to receive Holy Communion.

3. Gethsemane

The struggle to accept a harsh path is one which Jesus shares with us, which can give heart to those who find life difficult. The kin'dom is for the scared who overcome their fears. The struggle is common to us all, and is about our free acceptance of behaving in a way which God wants, not acting as automata insulated from harm. God does not guarantee an easy road to his followers, and this can give a real sense of the nature of discipleship to seekers.

The betrayal of Jesus by a close follower can chime with people who feel let down by friends or family members and be a way of creating a connection with their lives. Jesus' rebuke of Peter for striking off the soldier's ear is a clear kin'dom gesture about the renunciation of violence.

4. Good Friday

The rigged trial and the fickle crowd who have been turned from waving banners to calling for Jesus' execution (although it is possible that the demographic of the daytime Palm Sunday entry is younger and has come into the city with Jesus, whereas the evening crowd could be resident citizens of Jerusalem who have had almost no exposure to Jesus' ministry of preaching and teaching), can be preached as connecting points to people who feel that life has treated them unfairly. God through Jesus knows how that feels.

The powerful kin'dom themes here are the fact that Jesus sticks to the resolve he made in the wilderness after his baptism, in his wrestling with the temptation to use his Godly power for his own benefit. God or angels could, of course, have descended and smitten

Romans and Pharisees right, left and centre, but God's way is to let humanity do what we will. The rainbow after The Flood is the promise that drastic events will no longer happen at God's instigation, but because of sinful humanity's destructive behaviour. Jesus is the ultimate innocent victim of human violence: the Lamb to the slaughter.

The replacement of young Isaac by the ram, when Abraham so nearly sacrifices him because he understands it to be God's will, is the Old Testament story that says that God no longer wants such sacrifices. The killing is not licit nor required by God, and the reign of the Prince of Peace abhors killing. So the kin'dom approach to this part of Jesus' story, does not see the crucifixion as a good, but as a necessary consequence of humanity's sinfulness. Points of connection can be made with people involved in campaigns against the death penalty, against war, against the carrying of knives, and against other forms of violence and abuse which need to be resisted.

Jesus' words of forgiveness from the cross to those persecuting and taunting him as he suffers show the amazing extent to which God will forgive us appalling actions, and also the extent to which love is able to overcome violence and hatred when held onto with divine power. However, it is probably helpful to remember that it is God's prerogative to forgive at this point and we should not be forced into forgiving those who hurt us and cause us to suffer when we are not ready or able to do so.

Jesus' reassurance to the man crucified with him, who shows kindness in rebuking the scoffer on the other side, can be preached to give reassurance that it is never too late to align oneself with God.

Jesus' cry of dereliction is again a point of connection for those in despair – anyone's pain can be so great that they lose all sense of God – but it doesn't mean that God has disappeared. The cry is heard, and Jesus can speak words of faith at the end.

The declaration of faith by the Centurion that Jesus truly was the Son of God is another example of the breadth of inclusion in the Kingdom.

5. Holy Saturday

This has long been a popular theme in Orthodox Christianity and there has been an upsurge of academic and lay interest in it in more recent years in the UK. The idea of being stuck in a place of desolation and unknowing can be one that will strike chords with those uncertain of their relationship with God. The power of hoping in the waiting, of having confidence in a place of potential despair, can all be important good news.



9. EASTER

Resurrection

Quite how this mystery is preached depends upon your view of the Trinity. It can be preached as the Father rescuing and saving the Son, it can be preached as the divine in the Son being able to overcome death, but the version that is perhaps most interesting from a kin'dom perspective is the idea of the Holy Spirit working within the truly dead Christ to achieve new life. This interpretation of the unknowable can give us hope that the Spirit - God within us – can enable new flourishing from desperate situations. This then gives us a model for working with other people. We are not God and are not to fix things for them. They sometimes just do not have the power to change themselves or their situation - we can sit alongside them in their helplessness as Jesus descended into the place of death, which does have a pastoral and powerful place. The third option is that we work with them, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, give them a sense of hope, communicating energy and the possibility that prayer-fuelled change is achievable.

Forgiveness

It is striking how often Jesus uses words of reassurance – do not be afraid - in the resurrection appearances. This was often preached about along the lines of there being something scary about Jesus' physical appearance, but it is equally possible that having all failed Jesus to some extent (with the possible exception of John who is at least in the group keeping vigil at the cross) and therefore being complicit in Jesus' very painful death, the disciples are all expecting a pretty major rebuke ... but far from this, Jesus' tone and approach shows no anger. This gives hope to the people who feel that there is something in their life which puts them beyond the pale, and that they can never bring that particular thing to the foot of the cross and ask for it to be forgiven. They can be reassured that God does not take revenge, and the even causing the death of the Son of God can be forgiven.

Reconciliation

What follows the forgiveness is a mending, a renewal and an utter reconnection with God, to the extent that we humans can manage that. The Lakeside meal and the commissioning of Peter, the denier, is a moving story of a renewed trust being put into a fallible person. The commission **is** given, even though Peter cannot love Jesus in quite the total way that Jesus hopes. This again is a message of hope that we can be disciples and do our bit, even when we know we fall short of the ideal, even when our love for and faith in God wobbles and is not as wholehearted and unfailing as God's love for us. In kin'dom theology it is these Easter Day appearances and the themes of forgiveness and reconciliation which are the 'good news'. The resurrection which literally heals and restores Christ is also the healing and restoring of our relationship with God. It is both the sign and the act. It is the culmination of Christ's mission of bringing about the kin'dom, and effects the re-sealing of the bond of love between humanity and God that neither death nor hell nor princes nor powers can sever.

10. ROGATION SUNDAY

Rogation was traditionally a time when people prayed for God's blessing on their growing crops and on their work on the land. After a service, the congregation would go out of church and say prayers at a number of key agricultural sites in the parish. Sometimes this was combined with 'beating the bounds' – walking all around the boundaries of the parish and praying for people and places en route.

Aspects of Rogation can easily be applied to non-rural contexts as well, and involve people in the community. In addition to general prayer for the coming of God's kingdom, you can use the route to seek the welfare of, and ask God to bless, different people groups. The occasion can also provide an opportunity to reach out to local industries and institutions on the route, and ask them what they might want praying for, for their thriving, and invite them to come out as you arrive at their place, as well as prayers for the land and all it produces.

11. ASCENSION

This feast is a reminder of the 'otherness' of Jesus, and also the one where we are reminded of the universality of the message of repentance and forgiveness, and charged to bring it to the world. It is at the core of the Kingdom Evangelism paradigm.

It is no longer about the restoration of Israel – Jesus ducks that question in the Acts version – but it is about giving witness to a life-changing gospel to all. We follow Jesus as part of the Godhead. He does not forsake us, but provides the Holy Spirit to work with us.

This is the moment at which the disciples finally seem to accept that the awfulness of the crucifixion event is truly over, that they are forgiven and released and will be supported. It is like the stage in a young person's life when they are no longer reliant on the physical presence of adults, but grasp the reins of their own journey, knowing that adult advice and guidance will still be there to support them. The King reigns not by diktat, but by guidance and resourcing.

12. PENTECOST

This great feast of the arrival of the Holy Spirit on a large scale is the point at which the church begins in an international setting. Those who had shouted for Jesus to be crucified rather than Barrabas are convinced that Jesus is the Messiah and has risen. They come forward for baptism to accept forgiveness and a new relationship with God through Jesus. The power of the message to bring many to faith cannot be denied at this point. We are challenged to trust in the Holy Spirit's provision that where Jesus' Kingdom of servant-power, healing and reconciliation is preached many will hear and believe.

Yet Peter's sermon hasn't quite got the full breadth of the message – he is here addressing himself to [men of] Israel – i.e. believers in Yaweh/Jehovah – and it is only through the later encounter with Cornelius (Acts 10) that he finally grasps the inclusivity of the mission he has been given – that all are to be offered their rightful place in the Kingdom.

13. TRINITY SUNDAY

The theme that can be brought out here is Christ's kingship as integral to the Godhead. The kingdom to be established, that Jesus came to proclaim, is the same as that declared by God earlier in our Scriptures. Jesus' mission was to bring reconciliation between God and humanity and necessitated his voluntary giving up of his Godliness and power (kenosis) to engage with humans directly.



Whilst Jesus on earth prayed to Abba (perhaps best translated as Papa – a personal and warm but semi-formal form of address), ascended he is part of the triune Godhead. We now can rely on the third person – the Holy Spirit – to be the practical way in which God works through us.

Recent Trinitarian understandings emphasise the community within the Godhead between the three expressions – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Rublev's icon is familiarly used to represent this in the Orthodox tradition, although it is formally of the three angels who visit Abraham. At the time of the

painting, the Holy Trinity was the embodiment of spiritual unity, peace, harmony, mutual love and humility. Some talk of the interplay between the three persons in terms of dance (perichoresis). The ambivalence of gender in the depiction is also seen as helpful in terms of debates about the feminine within God, and gender identity.

For those in the Kingdom evangelism tradition who find the Cross a vexed symbol, the triple-sided Celtic knot symbol of the Trinity is a more comfortable expression of our faith in God as a united, collaborative and complex whole.

14. TRANSFIGURATION

Jesus is here revealed in all his majestic kingship, and as at his baptism is declared the Son of God. Whilst our kin'dom paradigm emphasises the Christ with us as brother and friend, here we need to acknowledge the power and authority which God has, but chooses to exercise with us and through us, rather than over us. Sometimes we can be in danger of domesticating God: here is a feast which recalls that God is infinitely bigger than we are and has a power that brings out fear, awe and wonder in the disciples (clearest in Matthew's account – Matt 17:1-8) and which we do well to remember.

In our paradigm this is not preached as a warning reminder of that withheld power, but primarily as a message of great encouragement to those who feel that they battle against overwhelming odds, of the limitless resources that we have to support us when we are working in concert with God's purposes.

15. HARVEST

This is a festival that fits relatively easily with the Kingdom paradigm. God's bounty is not exclusive to any one group, and the idea of privileged access to resources can be seen as contrary to the kin'dom approach, which is always drawing people in and including them. The King who rules in righteousness will ensure that the harvest is sufficient and is shared with the widows and orphans - shorthand for all in need.

It can be tied in to the notion of the Jubilee where debts are cancelled in order for people to be able to start again.

The harvest is also connected to our need to be good stewards of the earth, to rest the land and balance our need for food with a respect for the other species on our planet.

16. ALL SAINTS

The universality of sainthood is good to emphasise - the ordinary person who has lived a faithful life in Jesus' pattern is to be counted amongst the exulted alongside those often seen as more worthy in the eyes of the world. Encourage your congregation to celebrate their own saints.

If you also commemorate the martyrs on this Sunday in your tradition, then preaching on Jesus' willingness to be a martyr in order to fulfil God's purposes and his instruction to his disciples to be willing to "take up your cross" (Matthew 16:24-26) can be connected with political martyrs such as Oscar Romero who have been killed because of their adherence to a Kingdom which is here as much as hereafter.

17. REMEMBRANCE

It has recently become harder to separate Remembrance Day from a more nationalistic celebration of the dear departed heroes of WWI and II.

Whilst not offending those who may be present who can remember such individuals, as they become fewer it is more possible to return to the Kingdom paradigm, emphasising the need to remember all who have died in conflicts, and move away from a nationalistic

view that some deaths are more worthy than others, for God is a God of all nations and peoples.

An emphasis on the horror of warfare and of ‘never again’ and how we can all be peace-makers in our homes and congregations within a kin’dom of justice is also worth making. Jesus could have raised a human or angelic army to defeat the Romans, or looked for appeasement or conciliation, but his mission was to stand against the regime in a moral sense and demonstrate that there are other forms of power and victory. The crucifixion was a deeply immoral act of killing for political expediency, following a rigged trial, which one of the criminals accompanying Jesus acknowledged (Luke 22:40:41). The belief that it was part of a God-given process of overcoming death and salvation should not let us forget that. Injustice and misuse of power do need to be challenged – but life rather than more death is to be desired.

B7. What is the Key Message of the Cross within a Kingdom Paradigm?

The Writing Group

WHAT DO WE SAY ABOUT THE KING WHO DIED?

What is the challenge of “For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Cor 1:18)?

- The idea of the King who dies – and dies a very public and degrading death - is an important element in establishing the nature of God’s reign, as one where power is relinquished to be alongside humanity, and is not used oppressively.
- There is power for some in realising that Jesus was a victim – of betrayal, abandonment and denial by his followers; of a false accusation, a rigged trial and a miscarriage of justice; and of maltreatment and mocking by his executioners. He therefore understands what it is like to be a victim and can bring reassurance about God’s love for those in similar circumstances.
- The shame and shockingness of a symbol of execution as a symbol of faith is a complex one – we perhaps have over-spiritualised it and cease to see it as we would a guillotine. It is also a compelling and powerful image, particularly in its crucifix form.
- It is a model of self-giving to the uttermost – doing what must be done and staying true to a message of peace, and forgiving even in the last moments.

WHAT DO WE SAY ABOUT THE KING WHO RISES?

- There is triumph over death and evil – and the love of God brings all things back to healing and wholeness.
- The first thing that Jesus says in several of his appearances is “do not be afraid”.
- The disciples may be all too aware of how they have failed Jesus in the last days of his life. Jesus’ words of peace and reassurance show that failings are forgiven and all is restored. If the disciples and others around Jesus’ arrest, trial and death can be forgiven their actions of betrayal, denial, abandonment, miscarriage of justice and ultimately killing God’s Son, then there is hope for all.
- Jesus models a form of power through his death and resurrection which is about reconciliation between people and God against all odds, about countering violence with dignity, not more violence, and about the healing of divisions between life and death.
- Jesus will be and is the Christ in Majesty in heaven, there is no lessening of his essential power, but that power is devolved to us through the Holy Spirit to be co-builders of the kin’dom.
- This once-for-all illicit killing is forgiven and is all that is needed for all people to have an unbroken connection with God through life and after death.
- The message of the cross and resurrection is the same as the message that Jesus has been giving during his ministry about the possibility of relating to God as loving Father. God does not need to be bought off, or paid off, by the death of a son, but is the merciful one who mends and heals the hurts that humanity can wreak.



WHAT KIND OF CROSS?

The Orthodox cross, which has moved away from a more direct representation of the instrument of torture, can, for some, be more helpful as it becomes more clearly a symbol.

We have also found the Medieval symbol of the Tree of Life that grows out of the cross of death to be helpful in picturing our understanding of the Crucifixion.

We want to see this grow.
Contact office@utusheffield.org.uk to contribute or to take part in the supportive quarterly seminar series.