

Sermon St Thomas Ipswich, 2 bef Lent, 16 Feb 2020 - 'But first strive for the kingdom of God' Focus Inspiring Ipswich

Romans 8.18-25

18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²**We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now;** ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Matthew 6.25-end

25 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" ³²For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³**But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**

34 'So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

³³But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Those of you who have been coming to church for a while: how many times in your life have you sung the hymn ' Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness' ?

Have you ever stopped to think what that actually means? what is the Kingdom of God and his righteousness? ...the word righteousness is closely related to justice ...perhaps translated as just and right behaviour...seek the kingdom of God and its justice.

This morning, I would like to think about how we strive first for the kingdom of God. What is the Kingdom of God?

Everytime we pray the Lord's prayer, we say 'thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven'

(lots of references in the gospels: the K of heaven has come near (Mt3.2, 4.17)

Luke 17.20-21 ²⁰ Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; ²¹nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" **For, in fact, *the kingdom of God is among you.***'

What does the kingdom of God look like? What can we say from what we have learned from the scriptures?

In the kingdom of God,

...people live together in unity and peace;

..people know they are loved and accepted

... fruits of the spirit are at work : (Gal.5.22): love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

...love your neighbour as yourself ... (1 John 4.21 – the commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also). – in the KDoG people care for each other – neighbours look out for each other

... no one goes hungry – if we see a neighbour in need, we help out and give them food -it's more important to share than to fill one's own tummy.

...people who are sick or suffering get care and have folks around them

... people have time for each other – if someone is sad, there is someone to be with them; if someone is anxious, they get encouragement; people are attentive to each other.

...children grow up with adults around them who have time for them, who love them, give them appropriate attention, set boundaries,

...people are curious, want to learn and develop and grow; people have questions and are seeking - they have companionship in doing so.

... people care about creation – animals, plants, trees – they are respectful and don't exploit them

....people say sorry and forgive each other

...people are not afraid of dying, they know they are loved and they know that they are continuing in their life with God.

...people have a day of rest when they relax, enjoy God's world and creation

...people expect God to be active, at work in the world – through us and beyond what we can imagine.

And if we look around us, we realise the kingdom is already among us:

Here, in this church -in our community: the way people care for each other: share our sorrows; keep an eye on those who live alone; phone to see if folks are okay; listen to each other; people here give so much of their time to help others -or to make it possible for us to be the church – that includes going to pick up food from tescos twice a week to run Fairshare; to clean; repair things, look after things etc. etc. -that's the kingdom of God.

But not just in church: I see it in our local schools; the care and commitment of the teachers and staff – with children from thirty different countries and ethnic backgrounds and religions: modelling respect and thoughtfulness and care: that's the kingdom of God (I am sorry to say that often it is the parents undermine that work with their prejudices and rudeness).

We see the kingdom of God in **the night shelter where people** give up their time and sleep; in **care homes**; in the hospital and hospice with staff and volunteers are selflessly caring for people.

That's the kingdom of God ..it's right among us.

But, as we all know, there are big sections of our society and world where God longs to bring in the Kingdom; where people live with high levels of anxiety; of loneliness; of poverty; of self-hatred; despair; with violence and abuse.

I deeply believe that **Jesus gave us all we need to live by to make a difference in God's world; to be his hands and feet** – as Cat reminded us in her sermon last week.

Today's gospel reading gives us some important clues:

At a first reading Jesus' words in his morning's gospel don't quite make sense to us. How can you not worry and be anxious, if there are people starving; struggling to feed their families and to make ends meet.

How can we not worry about our life, what we will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what we will wear.

Jesus knows full well, that being anxious is part of being human. But, we hear the phrase: 'Do not be afraid; do not fear' in the bible time and time again.

Jesus says to us: learn to trust, to have faith and in today's reading he gives us three things to do when we are anxious:

Look at the birds in the air: -it is scientifically proven that being out in nature; going into the garden or park, looking at. Listening to the birds lifts our spirits.

Consider the lilies – notice the beauty that's around you: could be a flower; could be a song; could be a painting; could be a building; consider – and let it lift your spirit.

And then: but strive first for the kingdom of God and its righteousness. That means: do not be pre-occupied with your life and needs and egotistical schemes all the time. Look outside yourself. Make a difference in the world. Have the courage to reach out to others. Again: it is scientifically proven that helping others makes us feel better; helps to overcome anxiety and low mood.

Today, each of you are given a copy of 'Inspiring Ipswich'. Be inspired. Be inspiring.'
Archdeacon Rhiannon came in October and did the presentation of what it means for us.

Since then each parish has had a working group (we call it a learning community) praying and thinking about how we as a church could make a difference for people in our parish – following Jesus' command to 'strive first for the Kingdom of God'.

Our St Thomas learning Community and the PCC have developed a plan for St Thomas in the next five years to make a difference in this part of our town and beyond – to offer our hands, feet, talents in the service of God's kingdom.

The booklet explains the different aspects of Inspiring Ipswich – there are nine of them, clearly laid out. It's a huge opportunity for all of us to be involved – I think there will be something in here where everyone can contribute, be involved, take part.

Next Sunday, the service we will dedicate to share the ideas we have developed how St Thomas' might reach out to people in our parish, to be salt and light in our neighbourhood and wherever we are. Space in the service to hear about the parish plan and to explore this together further during lunch after the service.

How do we strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness? Doing it on our own is hard – doing it together helps us flourish and run.

It feels like God is at work, inviting us to trust Jesus, set our worries apart and strive for the kingdom of God. Amen.

What is Inspiring Ipswich about? The Nine steps

Imaginative Leadership – how can we do this better- make a difference in our communities

New opportunities to explore faith – everyone has questions

Serving and loving Ipswich – so that people in the toughest circumstances can find hope

Partnering with others – we can do more together and go further

Inspiring children, young people and families – they need our focussed attention

Reaching new people in new places in new ways – connect with people

Intentional Mission – look outward beyond our four walls

Nurturing disciples – We want to help people move forward int heir faith journey

Giving for growth – your heart follows you treasure – developing a generous culture
