

St Marylebone 6 Trinity 7 July 2013

*Jesus said to them, 'Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house ... eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you." Luke 10*

I imagine I'm not alone in having watched the scenes from Egypt, particularly from Tahrir Square this week and marvelled at the power and energy of a mass of people focussed on one thing: their belief that things need changing for the better and that they are going to change them. I heard someone refer, recently, to the human need for 'a future with legs'. When revolution happens that is what people are looking for: a future with legs, with possibility, with more hope and more abundance than the present seems to offer. For Egypt, whether bringing down Mohammed Morsi is the most effective way to achieve that goal I'm simply not qualified to judge. But the desire to create a better way of life reminds me very much of Jesus's energy and urgency about what he called the Kingdom of God.

When Jesus talks about God's Kingdom, most of the time he doesn't seem to be talking about heaven. In Matthew's Gospel the phrase 'Kingdom of Heaven' is used, but that's probably because Matthew was writing for a Jewish readership who would have found the direct use of God's name offensive.

So in talking about the Kingdom Jesus seems to be referring to something that is emerging in the world here-and-now, in a very real and concrete way. Something that is about justice and right relationships; about the wise use of money and resources; about being a neighbour to anyone in need; about the care of the

vulnerable and a willingness to stand in the shoes of a stranger. The Kingdom is an environment within which healing can happen, whether healing is about getting better, or more to do with being given the strength to live with our fragility and limitations, or allow ourselves to be held steady by others in a difficult time.

The Kingdom is also very much about peace. Not just the peace that is the absence of conflict, but peace that is fruitful and enriching because it's about living with difference – even living with conflict - in a way that deepens our relationships with those with whom we radically disagree, instead of pushing us apart.

This Kingdom is not just God's project, it's ours. Just as Jesus sent out seventy of his followers as labourers amongst God's harvest, so now he sends us. But there are so many needs, so many places where the values of God's Kingdom are damaged or obscured, so many people for whom life does not have legs: how do we know where to put our energy as individuals and as a church?

We each play our part differently. We spend our time in different places, living and working perhaps in commerce or in healthcare, in education or with young children at home, in volunteering, in the creative arts – in a thousand different contexts.

Whatever our passion, wherever our curiosity draws us, whoever it is that God has given us to love: that is where we labour amongst God's harvest. That is where we discover and grow the Kingdom.

Saint Paul's tells us, 'Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!' In other words don't sweat the small stuff, focus on things that

really make a difference. Be drawn by what is your passion, what moves you, what makes you cry with longing for it to be better. Get your energy from what you *can* do; from situations where you know you can make a difference. As Aristotle put it, your vocation lies 'Where your talents and the needs of the world collide'.

As a church St Marylebone plays to its strengths and relates to its context in nurturing the Kingdom. In the hospitals nearby the church connects with those whose health is fragile or whose lives are coming to an end. In the Healing and Counselling Centre people are offered the time, attention and space that they need to sit with their fragmented lives and begin the work that will help to put them back together. At Harvest time we connect with the women of the Church Army Hostel, whose ability to enjoy God's Kingdom is threatened by poverty, abusive relationships and a lack of somewhere to belong. As a church these are ways in which we seek to uncover and to nurture the emerging life of the Kingdom.

Of course as a church and as individuals there will be times when we need to take Jesus's very pragmatic advice about shaking the dust from our feet. There will be places and relationships which will reveal themselves as not being ready for harvesting. Situations that we itch to change but can't because we don't have the resources or the time isn't right or other people are just not on the same page as we are, making it impossible for us to achieve things together. It takes wisdom and discernment to know when to shake the dust from our shoes.

If human beings need 'a future that has legs' - a future that has space for opportunity and possibility, for creativity, for good relationships and for growth, then when Jesus

told the disciples to proclaim that 'the Kingdom of God has come near', he was offering them even more: a present that has legs, a life that is worth living now. A way of living that has eternal potential because it is rooted in God's life-giving love and intimacy and connection with all living beings.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, making his first presidential address to General Synod on Friday, said *'it is in prayer, individually and together, that God puts into our minds new possibilities of what the Church can be'*. I would add, if I'm allowed to add to the words of an Archbishop: it is in prayer and thoughtful reflection that God puts into our minds new possibilities of what the *world* can be. The seeds of the Kingdom are planted in the concrete reality and fertility of the world around us. We are called to grow and nurture and harvest that potential. There will be times when we shake the dust from our feet. But there must be far more when we just roll up our sleeves and get stuck in, whatever that may mean in the possibility and potential of our own unfolding lives.