

**Second Sunday before Advent 2015 (Evening)**

**Matthew 13: 24 – 30, 36 – 43**

The few weeks between All Saints and Advent – the few weeks that we're in, now – are known as the Kingdom Season. They are the last weeks of the church's year: a new year starts all over again with Advent. So these weeks mark the conclusion of the cycle; the conclusion of the salvation drama which has been unfolding since last Advent began. We've had the birth of our Lord, his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension into heaven, his gift of the Holy Spirit and about 20 weeks to try to get our heads round what it might mean to believe in a God who is a Trinity. And these concluding weeks of the Kingdom season are an opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved over the course of that cycle; to reflect on the nature of the kingdom that has been established by the drama that has unfolded.

The first thing that has been established is that there is more to life than this world. There is the reality of time and space in which we live: 60 minutes in every hour, 36 inches in every yard. There is also a different, but equally real reality. There is God's reality. And Jesus interconnects those realities.

Now, I am using my words very carefully. Jesus interconnects. He doesn't just connect. He doesn't connect in the way that a door provides a connection between one room and another or between inside and outside so that you can pass from being unambiguously in one place to being unambiguously in the other. Rather, Jesus interconnects, or mixes them up, by dragging one reality into the other and vice versa.

Jesus doesn't just come to earth to tell us about or even just to show us the Kingdom of God. Jesus comes to enact, to be the Kingdom of God. And as he does so, he thoroughly identifies with us. And that means that

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his disciples also, therefore, enact the Kingdom of God and create an interconnection between the reality in which we live and the greater reality of God. That interconnection is a two-way thing. We both look forward to the promise of a reality that, at the moment we only partly know; and we also drag that other reality into the world we do know. It's a question of both now and not yet.

All of which means that, in fact, the reality in which we live as Christians isn't just 60 minutes in every hour and 36 inches in every yard: there are bits of God's reality in it as well. It's a bit like a field that has both wheat and tears in it.

There can be no doubt that God's kingdom is being enacted in our midst. And I'm quite satisfied that that is not exclusively by people who are card carrying members of Christianity in particular or just some form of organised religion in general. Where there is love and compassion, there is God. The difference

being a Christian makes as that we are hoping that by opening God's Word and breaking bread together we are encountering God and by so doing orienting our dispositions to love and compassion; and thereby being equipped to enact his Kingdom.

Equally, though, there can be no doubt that there is evil in the world we inhabit. We know there are things within our personal lives that are antithetical to the Kingdom of God; and we know only too well that plain evil is a fact: we have seen it this weekend in Paris. The massacres and the atrocities are nothing to do with Islam: they are to do with evil. The Quran makes it plain that killing innocent people is like killing the whole of humanity. So killing innocent people cannot be part of Jihad. Extremists who call themselves Jihadists are distorting Jihad as a cloak to cover their own plain evil.

There is wheat and there are tears. Jesus tells us so. And Jesus tells us that that's how it is. In the parable

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the servants want to go and root out the tares but the master says no, do nothing until harvest. Similarly in real life to which the parable relates, evil will continue to coexist alongside the enactment of God's Kingdom until the end of time. It is an inevitable part of the human condition.

Simply left there, stated like that, it seems that what has been established by the end of the drama unfolded across the church's year is something that achieves precisely nothing: there are still evil terrorists rampaging across our cities, indiscriminately massacring innocent people as they enjoy a meal out, watch a football match or go to a concert.

But we don't simply leave it there. We don't fling our arms up in the air in resignation and say we can expect things to be no different this side of kingdom-come. There will be tares as well as wheat, that is true, but those parts of reality that are enacting the Kingdom of God are a dynamic agency. In other parables they are

described as yeast or salt or likened to mustard seeds that grow and grow and grow. Being a disciple of Jesus, being someone who enacts the kingdom of God, someone who, through Jesus, interconnects this world with what is greater than this world means to be someone who is changing this world; being someone who is ushering in the kingdom of God; being someone who is reshaping this world in which we live now more closely to correspond with the world which is not yet. And we do this by individual acts of kindness; but we do this by our social and political commitments, too.

We weep in solidarity with the people of Paris. We cry out with them in their pain. And we commit ourselves, through our commitment to the Kingdom we are celebrating, to the ways of justice and peace through which evil will be overcome.

Amen.

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