

## **Trinity 9 – 17 August 2025**

### **Isaiah 5.1-7; Luke 12.49-56**

In one of my Bible commentaries the section of Luke's Gospel we have just heard read is headed "Alert for the Kingdom" and that is exactly what it sounds like. In the sections which come before it, Jesus is at pains to point out to the disciples that they are not to worry about their life: not in the sense of putting no effort into it, but in the sense of not being unduly concerned about it. The question arises: when does a proper concern for daily life spill over into an excessive anxiety, which could then become a hindrance to working for the Kingdom ? We all do it, to some extent, don't we ? It's a sort of Mary and Martha situation in each one of us.

Luke of course is writing at a later date than the other Gospel writers (with the exception of John), which leads us to think that by this time (roughly AD 85) there must have been doubts about the imminent return of Jesus. So the warning from Jesus expressed here through Luke is that God wants to give the Kingdom to his disciples – a great gift – but Luke wants to emphasise the urgency of the situation, so that his readers (people like us) will not lose hope and the sense of being prepared for the gift when it comes.

So we reach today's Gospel passage, which points to the need for disciples to respond to the urgency of the times even at the expense of causing divisions within their own families (verses 52-53). It sounds a bit like news reports from the time of the Scottish and Brexit referendums. These are quite difficult sayings of Jesus, but intended by Luke to highlight a dimming of the fire which drove the twelve apostles forward in the immediate aftermath of Jesus's death and resurrection.

And what is this fire that Jesus came to bring ? For the OT prophets fire can be a symbol of purification, or more often, of judgement. Jesus seems to be referring to the work of the Spirit, represented by the flames of fire at Pentecost, especially through baptism into the Christian community. This work of the Spirit will come to fruition as a result of his own 'baptism', as he calls it, which is presumably a reference to his own death and resurrection, designed to give birth to Jesus's whole way of life for us all. Luke's readers will be in for difficult times.

Our times are full of difficulty too: great inequalities of wealth, extreme climate swings, a dearth of peace and justice to name but a few, as Isaiah is recording for the times he was living in. There are plenty of areas in our lives which need the Holy

Spirit's attention. But we can't lead our lives on permanent red alert, as some social media websites would have us do. What should our focus be ?

Thy Kingdom Come. We say these three words every week, every day for some, and maybe even more often. They are of course contained in what we call The Lord's Prayer, the prayer that Jesus himself taught us. A few weeks ago I was preaching here about that prayer, and specifically about the phrase Thy Kingdom Come. Many people ask what it means exactly. Some think it is a reference to the second coming of Jesus, which the first disciples were expecting. But, as I hinted at earlier, Luke is writing for disciples who are living out their lives about 50 years after the death of Jesus, hence his desire to emphasise urgency.

There has been a church on this site since the fifteenth century, and as most of you know there was an older church here before it, attached to the priory. That history represents countless generations of people worshipping here on this spot, as well as working out God's mission to his world in Woodbridge and beyond. All of them, in their different ways, were responding to God's call and to the example of Jesus Christ to follow him and serve others to the best of their ability. In our generation it has fallen to us, using all the talents God has endowed us with, to do the same. We know that sometimes we fall short, sometimes we fail altogether, and sometimes we just don't get the message. The important thing is not to be discouraged, we dust ourselves off, learn from our mistakes, and pray that God will show us the way forward and enable us through the Holy Spirit to continue his work. So my take on Thy Kingdom Come is that in this way we can pray that the Kingdom may always be in the process of coming.

The world in which we live is currently full of uncertainty; danger lurks in too many places, as we hear almost every day, prejudice continues to raise its head, and justice is a fragile commodity. There is a Taizé chant which you may know, which contains the words "The kingdom of God is justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Come, Lord, and open in us the gates of your kingdom". And if we find concepts like justice and peace too big for us to grasp or do anything meaningful about, the gates of the kingdom can also be opened in a myriad of different ways of service, for example in helping others to find their true potential. As Jesus said in John 10, I came so that you may have life, and have it in abundance. Thy Kingdom Come.

And so we all look to the future, wherever we may be, in the knowledge that God is with us at all times, even when we forget him and particularly when times are tough.

We all continue on our Christian journey, which is a life-long journey, whose destination is God himself, from whom we came and to whom we long to return.

Amen – PBW 15.8.2025