

I'm going to inherit a kingdom!

Rev Felicity O'Brien, August 8th 2011, Luke 12: 32-40. All rights reserved.

Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Did you hear that first line? I'm really excited! I'm going to inherit a kingdom! I know, because it says right there in the Gospel reading, that it is my father's pleasure to give me the kingdom! That means I'll be part of the kingdom of God! That sounds like it could be Heaven breaking out on earth! But, hang on a minute, what does that mean?

I want to pick up three lines from our gospel reading today:

First, "It is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Second, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also".

And third, "Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit".

"It is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." What does that mean? Is that here? Now? Or after we die? I think the old phrase is "pie in the sky, bye and bye. Is the kingdom here on earth? But how can it be when it's all broken and messed up. The world has problems. Does God even know? Has he noticed? But he still wants to give us the kingdom.

What is God's kingdom? Every time we are what God wants us to be, is kingdom breaking out. We ask in the Lord's prayer "Your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven." Jesus taught us that prayer, so it must be the way God wants us to expect his kingdom. Here, around us, in the midst of our broken and messy world.

The natural world has so much beauty that it's easy to see God's kingdom – when we see the tuis in the kowhai tree, or a blue harbour glinting after days of rain, we know God's kingdom is here. But how about in the grubby back-street, where people are sleeping rough? Or in the suburbs, where the kids go to school with no shoes or breakfast?

God really is present even in the messy bits, the unlovely parts. The kingdom of God can break out in those places. I saw a movie recently called "the Soloist," set in the slums of Los Angeles, where a cellist suffering from mental illness played to the people of his community. Kingdom broke out, as they were all ministered to by the beauty of his music. Even in the worst area of the city, people were moved by something lovely.

What is the kingdom like in heaven? We have some glimmers, but I'm sure the most important factor in heaven is being in the presence of God all the time. God wants us to have that now - God wants us to live in his presence totally on earth too! How exciting!

It is the Father's to give, not ours to work for. We cannot create kingdom of God around us by our own efforts. But when we move with the Holy Spirit in our sail, God can accomplish anything, and we are part of it. We *can* be the hands, the feet, the voice, the pen of Jesus on earth. We've heard about the hands and feet of Jesus. But what do I mean by 'the voice and the pen' of Jesus? When we strive to right wrongs, when we stand up for those who cannot defend themselves, or who need help, when we care for each other in partnership with the Holy Spirit, we are bringing God's kingdom to earth.

It can be easy when we are reaching out to have an 'us and them' mentality. 'We'll minister to those less fortunate than ourselves'. But God loves everybody equally. In God's kingdom there are no divisions between giver and receiver, doctor and patient, carer and client. – it should be an us and us mentality. It is only how we respond that divides us from each other.

How to we get to a place where we can be part of God's kingdom breaking out around us? The second extract from our reading gives us a clue. "Where you treasure is, there will your heart be also". This is all about priorities.

What is the tuning of your heart? Is it tuned to the channel of work? Or money? Or holidays? Or children? Or hobbies? These things can all be good, but too much focus on them is a distraction. Or maybe you're tuned to the living channel, the *real* living channel - being the agent of spreading God's love in your community. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. When we truly value others as God does, and truly love each other they become our treasure, and our heart swings to them. We find an outward-looking perspective, not a self-centred one.

The world these days is very me-me- me, focused on what we can get, what we can own, but the ads on TV only give us one side of the picture. Jesus tells us to give it all away! This doesn't just mean money, it can mean time, a listening ear, a ride in the car.

'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.'

Don't be like the man who put all his money under the mattress. Well, it's safe, you might say. But years of hoarding, and no spending, just led to ... a lumpy mattress! In fact, he had absolutely nothing to show for it, because the government had changed over to decimal currency sometime during his hoarding, and the cash he had was useless. Imagine what could have happened if he had made a micro-

loan, for example. Sowing even just \$20 into a needy community can be life-giving! Tear Fund has a wonderful programme of these loans, and they make such a difference.

Our treasure needs to be people, so our hearts can be tuned to giving out God's love.

The church is discovering again that looking outward leads to new growth and life. Bishop Graham Cray from the United Kingdom spoke in the diocese recently about "Fresh Expressions." New forms of church for a fast changing world are being encouraged, working with Christians from a variety of denominations and traditions. The mold of only having services for a couple of hours on a Sunday morning is being broken! There are services for sporty families – no more having to choose between letting your kids try for the top team, and church on Sunday. Now people can do both! Hundreds of new congregations are being formed alongside more traditional churches. Note that it's alongside, not instead of, traditional churches. The older churches have a big role in supporting new groups of people who want to worship God.

When Christians from different backgrounds come together and share, kingdom breaks out! The old barriers are breaking down – I'm sure many of you will remember the conflict between Catholics and protestants several decades ago. But now, we have new life and harmony, as we bring Alpha courses to our community together. Just last week at the prayer booth I was talking to a man from our local Catholic church, whom I had met on an Alpha course. We were able to make a real connection. Our treasure is not our denomination, or our traditions, but rather God himself, and the rest is all optional.

Our reading gives us another clue about how to be a part of God's kingdom breaking out. My third line from the Gospel reading is *"Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit."* Be ready, see opportunities.

Let's have a look at that image. We might think that it's easy to just light our lamps, a flick of a switch. It gets bright straight away –well, with the new energy saver bulbs it might take a few minutes. But Jesus was referring to an oil lamp. Oil lamps require constant attention. Wicks must be trimmed and oil replenished. A poorly maintained lamp will not light when you need it. Even a well-maintained lamp takes time to light — unsatisfactory in a real emergency. We can't always be physically awake and watchful, but this passage is talking about a readiness of heart. The old song sums it up "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine."

If we're living consistently in a Kingdom way,- and there's lots in the Bible to help us do that, -the Holy Spirit can use us whenever opportunities arise. We may not consider ourselves able, but if we are available God can supply the "able" part.

Barbara Glasson was available. She is a Methodist minister who moved to Liverpool six years ago and had no church building and no congregation. The large Methodist Central Hall had been closed down before she arrived.

Barbara started by walking through the streets and trying to listen to the people in the centre of the city for over a year. She attended to the very poorest people, those who were really struggling.

As Barbara listened, the idea was born to begin to gather people, not for a church service or a discipleship course or to listen to a sermon, but to bake bread. People came together to mix and to knead and to bake, to eat together and to learn new skills. In the simple act of baking and breaking bread, stories were told, friendships grew and a community was born.

As the community formed, there were opportunities for catching and learning about faith in very natural ways. It was relational – people being themselves together. Eventually, faith found expression in worship at first midweek and now, occasionally on Sundays. From what looked like a dead church, the Methodist Church in the centre of Liverpool is now seeing resurrection.

Barbara was ready for God to lead her. Are you ready? Are your lamps lit? Can you hear God speaking to you? The E100 challenge will help you to hear from God through the Bible. Is your heart tuned to the channel of God's treasure, - people? Have you cleared your schedule of distractions, things that take you away from the Kingdom?

It's time to get excited, because it is your father's pleasure to give you the kingdom!

All you have to do is pick it up and unwrap it.

Prayer.

Dear God, who loves us so much, thank you for your promises to give us your kingdom. Help us to see where we can help your kingdom to grow, Heaven right here in our messy and broken world. Shake us with your Holy Spirit, wake us up, and be the wind in our sails. Give us the strength to show your love to everyone, just as you pour it out so freely.

Amen

