

Romans 8:26-end

Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

I hope that we all know what it is like to look forward to something.

And I guess we are conditioned to think that we can expect good things if we ourselves don't do anything harmful or bad.

As children, we are taught that rewards are good things to work for.

As a teenager I am sure I would have found washing up after Sunday lunch much more edifying if I had been receiving payment of some kind.

If a student works hard at his/her lessons then they will, hopefully, reap the rewards of good exam results, the better the result the more opportunity in the work place.

We look forward, as children, to Christmas morning, when, if we are lucky, there are exciting parcels to open.

And if we've been good then Santa will have brought what we asked for. If you know you've been naughty it's a bit of wait and see situation!

As adults we look forward to all sorts of things.

Celebrations like weddings and parties, holidays in new places. A special holiday as a reward for the toll the past year has taken on us.

What is the most exciting thing you have looked forward to in your life so far.

Not including maybe coming back into church next Sunday !!

I spent some minutes pondering this before deciding I am an extremely boring person and I am certain most of you will be able to remember lots of exciting holidays and experiences.

I think my most exciting time was looking forward to the birth of my first grandchild – and I had nothing to do with that; although I do remember

thinking I wasn't sure I was going to be able to take much more as the labour progressed.(wimp)

One of the reasons life *can* stop being exciting and challenging, I think, is a resistance to change. Lots of people, not everyone, struggles in some respect with change.

"If a thing is not broken don't fix it" – the problem with that philosophy is that the "thing" may not be broken but possibly may be wearing out slowly and becoming less reliable.

In the reading from Matthew, this morning, there are six parables including the explanation of the parable of the weeds, which Sharon took us through last week.

This week we hear the parables of the mustard seed, growing into a great tree capable of housing birds, the yeast, that permeates every part of the dough; the hidden treasure, discovered and then hidden again until enough money to buy the field could be obtained; the pearl merchant, who gave everything else he had in order to own one precious and special pearl, the fishing net, where the good fish are separated from the not so good, which are then thrown back.

All different parables but all with a similar message; the Kingdom of Heaven is more valuable than anything else we can experience and must be sought after and when it is found, and cherished, like the yeast it permeates the whole of life.

I watched an interview on Facebook from the initiative "Thy Kingdom Come" between the Archbishop of Canterbury and Nicky Gumbel, who oversees HTB and many church plants – he began the Alpha course many years ago.

The discussion was regarding prayer and Justin Welby asked Nicky Gumbel, "When we pray Thy Kingdom Come" what do you think happens?

His answer encompasses all these parables." When we pray, it brings God's rule and Kingdom into our life and that changes our life. What we are praying is that more people will encounter Jesus because then, church will be revitalised and society will be transformed."

And that is what Thy Kingdom Come means because when people's lives are changed they begin to think seriously about the poor and issues of justice, and communities are transformed.

When we pray, "Thy Kingdom Come" and Jesus comes into a life it transforms our attitudes to other people, the Holy Spirit softens our hearts, changes us and makes us more like Jesus." And that is a pearl beyond price.

The results of our knowing a love for other people is a desire for justice to be done and an abhorrence to all things that go against that.

And praying this prayer means we don't have to look forward to, or wait impatiently for God's Kingdom to Come because its already here, in the lives of all those who have welcomed Jesus into their life; and unlike the examples we began with where rewards are earned – this promise of finally being with Jesus in eternity is a consequence of seeking out the Kingdom in the here and now. It's not a reward simply a giving and receiving of eternal love.

Jesus was a threat to the religious leaders in the OT because they were afraid of the change it would mean, to their understanding of the Scriptures, to take his teaching seriously.

However, Jesus was not disregarding the old teaching but opening that teaching out to new possibilities.

They were looking forward to a future kingdom preceded by judgement, you will enjoy the Kingdom of God in the future if.....

Sadly even now this is the understanding of some people; as a reward for being good on earth one day we will be in heaven.

Jesus however taught that the Kingdom was here already, that was why he came, to *advance* God's Kingdom on earth, and it was judgement that was for the future.

And it was judgement by God alone.

Verse 52 of Matthew 13:

Then he added, every teacher of religious law who has become a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a person who brings out of the storehouse the new teachings as well as the old.

And that is good advice for us today as well. If we refuse to consider that what we have previously understood by O.T. Bible teaching doesn't have a semi-colon, then we are missing one of the greatest opportunities to meet with Jesus, that it is possible to have.

The Bible is God's living word, relevant to the time it was written but contained by the culture of the day.

It is *still* God's living word but no longer contained by the culture of those long off days. We must consider, does it have a new relevance in today's culture?

The moral, ethical teaching on love is as relevant today as it was then but if we don't open our minds and hearts to at least consider new relevance in today's culture then some of us will hold on to guilt or regret, and doubt that God could love us or fear eventual judgement.

We need to hang on to Paul's glorious message of Romans chapter 8.

V38-39

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God. Death can't and life can't. the angels can't and the demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the power of hell can't keep God's love away. Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Notice he doesn't say there will be no fears today or worries tomorrow. Paul is saying no matter what happens in your life or where you are, if you have sought and found the pearl of great price, the Kingdom of Heaven, nothing can take his love from you and you can be safe in the assurance he is here with you and he longs to permeate the whole of your life, as the yeast permeates the dough; so that in turn, he can permeate the church and society through you.

The good news is:

The Kingdom of Heaven is here now

True, there are still dark places still to be changed .... By showing Christian love through example but let's remember:

Come, *now* is the time to worship

*Now* is the time to give your heart.