

26th July 2020; sermon for St George's Eastergate.

When the present state of affairs in our world first reared its ugly head several months ago ministers of religion were in just as much confusion fear and chaos as anyone else. I heard colleagues saying things such as 'How can we expect the lectionary readings each Sunday to be relevant to our present situation? What will we have to say to our people? What sections from the Bible will be the best to preach from? Etc' In the middle of our Epistle for today we have the words..'All things work together for good for those who love God.' Can we continue to maintain this line when surrounded by the chaos of our present day? Can we really expect people around us to believe that behind our universe is a loving God...now!! Well I maintain that the two readings we have been given for today could not be better placed to give us the confidence we need in the world we are living in.

In Jesus' earthly life he, as a God-fearing faithful Jew, found himself trying to explain the workings of God to people who were questioning with all their being how the sphere of God's influence, His Kingdom, could possibly be in any sense present as long as the world of their day remained in its present state. 'Look around you' they would be saying 'its obvious isn't it that the Kingdom of God does not exist on this earth.' The little parables in Matthew 13

are all, in their different ways, answers to this accusation..perhaps the only sorts of answers we can ever give. Lets look at those we have just read. The mustard seed. Jesus, I think, aimed to startle his hearers. Instead of choosing an exotic or beautiful plant to describe the Kingdom of heaven he preferred the mustard seed. He said to his hearers in Galilee God's Kingdom is like this common invasive weed growing rampantly, seemingly from nowhere, into a tree 8-10feet high. Then it does something life-giving: it offers shelter and shade. Can we not translate that into something of relevance for today's world?

And again yeast, like the tiny mustard seed cannot be seen but does its work silently and powerfully from within a lump of dough. Yeast works unseen to make bread happen...interestingly Jesus compared God's kingdom to the yeast and not the bread thus making God's Kingdom the invisible catalyst for growth rather than the finished product...that is dynamic! The people of God have a vital role to play in the world of today

Then Jesus talks about hidden treasure in a field and a pearl of great price..both illustrations of the fact that the person who understands the value of the Kingdom would not hesitate to think twice about getting rid of everything else in order to be able to possess it. Then lastly, and again lets remind ourselves of those who may well be saying in our present day to believe in God of love today is crazy,

Jesus reminds his followers that one day the strange assortment of fish in the net will be sorted out. All these parables are just for us...today..a reminder that God is in control and His influence is growing.

If we should need any further help in our present lives it is right here in the Epistle. Remember last week we heard St Paul talk about the generosity of God's love in adopting us into the intimacy of His family life. Today we read how this radically transforms our prayer life. In our present situation we may well not know where to start in our prayers but God knows already, he understands our groanings and His spirit which is within us interprets them. At the moment when we are struggling to pray, have no idea really what to pray for don't worry about it because just at that point God's spirit is most actively at work, He will say it for you...all you can do is groan! This becomes a prayer beyond prayer! There is a challenge here to us all to groan out loud to God in and through the pain of the world around us...that is our vocation.

Our Epistle this morning contains the most confident Christian statement in the NT. 'V28 We know', says Paul,'that all things work together for good, for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.' These are words that are often used at funerals at a time when people are having to come to terms with the death of someone they love and they are words that Paul wrote not

out of a life of comfort but one in which he faced persecution, famine, nakedness and the sword. He wasn't in jail when he wrote this letter but he soon would be again. Paul could look those around him in the face with confidence. He was convinced that in the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth God was at work in a new way and that even death had been conquered because Jesus had appeared to him when he was at his most sceptical.

So in conclusion, even in our present circumstances we can face our critics with confidence...we have the Spirit of God in our lives; our vocation is to spread the word by whatever means we have at our disposal, that God, our loving God, is in charge of His world and it is to him that we must be crying out today.

AMEN.