

Tuesday Evening Sermon – 2nd June 2020

So Psalm 72, this royal sum which speaks of the king and the kingdom and is a prayer that people would have prayed for hundreds of years. As we saw on Sunday morning, there is so much in this Psalm which links the king and God and God's kingdom so closely together, so entwined together and really what we're seeing here is that we're to understand that through the king of Israel God's rule would be seen.

And that comes across in a number of different verses. We could start with verse 1 for example, there we read of this prayer: 'Endow the king with your justice, O God, with your righteousness.' The prayer is not simply for the king to be just or to be good, but to have God's justice, God's righteousness.

That's further developed with him to judge God's people in verse 2 and then we see later in the Psalm things that you just can't really imagine for a purely human king. For example verse 5: 'May he endure as long as the sun as long as the moon through all generations.' The Sun and the moon obviously not understood quite as we understand them in our scientific age, but seen as signs of things which last forever and so asking this prayer that the King would endure for as long as these bodies in the sky. Yet, how can this be for a human king? It boggles the mind

And what is more there's that prayer further down in verse 8 for him to rule 'To the ends of the earth'; indeed for 'all nations' in verse 11 'to serve Him'. There's this idea here that the kingdom is going to extend and whilst they didn't know the full extent of the world and their day but as far as they knew they imagined the king ruling that far and further to the whole. Yet what human king ever had yet, even in the great nations of the time? And later as Israel was ruled by other powers - to still hold this prayer to pray this prayer and imagine and pray for a king that rules beyond just the land of Israel, beyond even the peak of Israel's history with David and Solomon. to yearn for him to rule even further? No human king in Israel's time managed such a thing.

And then if we go further down again to verse 17, there is the prayer that his name would 'endure for ever'. But what's striking is that just a few verses later it's 'praise be to God's glorious name for ever' and if you look at the Psalms, it's the name of God that is the focus of praise - not the King's name. Yet as we saw in verse 17, 'May his name endure for ever' - may the name of the King endure forever. And connected in the same verse of 19 is this idea that 'may the whole earth be filled with his glory' and we saw earlier about the nations, of his the kingdom extending to all nations, that the whole earth be filled with his glory - again this entwining of God and the king in God's kingdom together.

It really starts to raise the expectation that much more than just some ordinary king is yearned for or expected. There starts to be nurtured in Israel this expectation of one who will come, a king who will come, who would be much more than just a human king - there has to be a messiah, someone special, set apart, anointed in some way beyond what they can comprehend, to fulfil this prayer.

Now that the seeds of it, as we know from Samuel, were sown in David's time, that David was promised by God in second Samuel chapter seven. God said to David that he would establish a house for David and that God would raise up David's offspring to

succeed him, that God would establish his kingdom and that Kingdom the throne of his kingdom would be established for ever. And what is more God said 'I will be his father and he shall be my son'. The seeds of it are sown in David's time and it develops over time, greater clarity comes such that in the time of Isaiah later on and a portion that we would often read more at Christmas time than in the heat of this summer we see in Isaiah chapter 11 how this prophecy developed. And so we read there in Isaiah 11...

Friends, there develop that expectation that one would come a messiah, an anointed king, who would be of the Lion of David, who would inherit the promises made to Abraham, promises from Genesis 12...

And what do we see in our Psalm, we see this idea that the nations will be blessed through the king. But the king is only blessed because God's blessing is upon him. And so it's really from God and so God is entwined with the king here and God's kingdom with the king - it's all entwined in the rule of God.

And so we know, now looking back, it can never just be a human king - yes, he would be of the line of David, but there had to be something more to him to bring about what Isaiah spoke about of a kingdom of a world where what is natural is completely turned on it's head, and things changed so radically and powerfully.

And so people had to keep praying for the kingdom of God to come, for one to come, the Messiah to come and then one day Jesus came, proclaiming that the kingdom of God was near, it was breaking in with him to this world and everything was going to change. The prophecies of Isaiah would begin to come true, the prayers of God's people like in Psalm 72 were to begin to come true. And of course who did Jesus minister most? He ministered most to the poor and needy, giving them life and wholeness beyond what they could ever imagine. And we know from the letters to the church, from the Apostle Paul in particular, but elsewhere as well, Paul writes in Ephesians chapter 1 that God had a plan and it was put into effect when the times had reached their fulfilment o bring unity of all things in heaven and on earth under Jesus under the Christ, the Messiah – and so when the time was right he came.

Friends only Jesus, only Jesus could be this king and only because of the cross and his resurrection. It was he who conquered death, the first to rise from the dead to prove that he had conquered death. Friends he is King and he now sits at the right hand of God reigning there, given the Spirit to pour out on his people his kingdom might be extended. He sits in the position of power and authority at God's right hand even now because he conquered, he was victorious, he was proven to be the promised king and messiah.

So, what does this mean then for us? Well a great deal clearly. One of the things that I've been pondering recently and I spent some time during my week off reading about it was about 'discipleship' - about how do we go about seeking ways to disciple others, to invite them in, to equip them and encourage them as disciples of Jesus? And it's got me thinking as I read this Psalm alongside what I was reading there it's got me clearly thinking of Matthew 28 and from Jesus the Great Commission to the disciples to 'go to all the ends of the earth' to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey him.

And it gets me thinking that we're to be part of how this kingdom extends. Yes we're to pray, to pray that God's kingdom would come and will come more to that and a few moments. But we also have a part to play - disciple making is not just going to happen; God has no plan B. We are it friends, the church, we are called to go make disciples and that is principally how Jesus imagines his kingdom to grow. As we see in Acts chapter one, that they are to be his witnesses in Jerusalem Samaria Judea and to all the ends of the earth, just like our psalm.

But the witnessing was more than just being a body of people in a place. It was more than just loving their neighbour. It was more than gathering for worship on a Sunday. It was active disciple making because by making disciples the world starts to change. The things, the facets, of God's kingdom start to come about, which is why I said on Sunday do we want to see hopelessness decrease? Do we want to see isolation decrease? Do we want to see a crime decrease? So many things happen and change and can only change really when the kingdom of God comes.

We might think of the stories of revival, I particularly think of the Welsh revival and I remember reading that in the Welsh revival they actually had to ask the police officers to stop doing their jobs effectively because there was no one in the jails, there was no one in the cells, because God's Spirit came, brought revival and people became disciples of Jesus, the kingdom of God came in their midst and not only did people come to faith but lives changed.

There was that question from Sunday: do you want to see our world become a better place? Then pray for the kingdom of God to come. Because we have a king who has a glorious Kingdom and he wants it to come in our world. He wants it to extend to the ends of the earth and principally that happens as his church, you and I, share our faith, meet Jesus and see people become disciples.

Now how we do that we all need to learn. I need to learn as well. Because no one really disciplined me, it has mostly been guesswork and trial and error and even now it's trial and error and guesswork because part of my training in the Church of Scotland was not actually how to go and make disciples, which tells you an awful lot about the Church of Scotland frankly. But there are people, there are ways, to learn how to disciple others and if we want to see the kingdom of God come in our parish, in the Braes area and our nation and world, then we need to learn how to go and make disciples.

You'll be hearing about later this week in the notices, probably in an email too, you're going to be hear about an invitation from the Strategy Group, which is a group within the Kirk Session, they've been looking and clarifying what are our purpose and values for Brightons Parish Church and what is there in our DNA already? What is there in the Scriptures? And trying to bring some clarity on that because, well, it's quite hard to carry around a whole Bible with you. And so we need some touch-stones, we need some kind of foundation clarity on things, and the invitation is going to be there for you to join in some focus groups that the strategy group are doing it and the 'purpose' includes a clear focus on this idea of discipleship because of this teaching that is there throughout the Scriptures: the God as our King, Jesus is the promised King, He proved it, and he has a kingdom and he wants that kingdom to extend to the ends of the earth.

But principally how he does that is through his church, His church going and making disciples.

So look out for that email, look out for the notice, read it, get involved in what we're asking as we'd love as many people to get involved to help bring clarity to our purpose and our values as Brightons Church in this new season of our life, to bring clarity to what our strategy might be in the future.

But going back to our Psalm, one of the things that I picked up in the commentaries I was reading was the structure of the Psalm and what's very striking is that the Psalm begins with God's justice, and righteousness, and particular righteousness is repeated several times verse 1 verse 2 verse 3 and then come things like compassion for God's afflicted people, for the children of the needy, then comes things like Shalom, peace, which we'll look at in a moment - the goodness, the prosperity of the nation and the kingdom and to the world.

But first comes righteousness, and this wasn't an idea that was unknown to God's people, the Mosaic law spoke of it as well that, first of all, was righteousness, even before compassion there was to be no favouritism to poor or rich. Righteousness was to come first and this was because it was core to who God is.

Psalm ninety seven says: 'clouds and thick darkness around him, righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.' They were key to who God was/is, and so they were key to his kingdom. And so there's this prayer, for the King to have this justice and righteousness from God, from these the rest might flow, and so for example you see in Isaiah that righteousness is the soil, the atmosphere, the climate within which peace can flourish and the same is true in the Psalm.

And it's unhelpful in the NIV actually that in verse 3 it says 'may the mountains bring prosperity to the people' and an unhelpful choice of word there because if you go back to the Hebrew, the word is Shalom, which would normally be classified as peace. And so maybe the translators are trying to get away from 'peace' because we think of peace as a lack of conflict, of a peace of soul like calmness and so I can see what they're trying to do. But prosperity just doesn't quite catch it, and maybe they're not quite ready yet maybe to go with a word like wholeness, which I think would catch much more of the meaning of Shalom. It's used by many commentators: wholeness or well-being, and this is a wholeness or well-being that's multidimensional.

I quoted in a sermon somewhere in the last year or so about Tim Keller. He has a really helpful article in the NIV Study Bible and you can get on the NIV Study Bible website, it has a really helpful article about Shalom and he says Shalom is 'multi-dimensional – it's complete well-being, physical, psychological, social and spiritual. It flows from all of one's relationships being put right with God, with and in one's self, and with others.'

And so this idea of Shalom is so rich and wide and varied and deep. It's much more than peace, it's much more than prosperity and it's not just spiritual. We often equate with this peace with being just spiritual but it's more than that, but the spiritual is core to it because from that spiritual can come the rest. From that righteousness, that right relationship with God, that walking in his ways, can come peace, can come

compassion for the needy. It's interesting that the needy are spoken of a couple of times, 'to save the children of the needy, in verse 4, 'to save the needy from death' verse thirteen, and what we have to remember is that in the wisdom literature in particular death generally was not seen as just happening and often death would come about through your choice. Obviously that's not always the case but saving the needy from death, this way of life that they were maybe trapped in because of the injustice around them, and so this idea that the most defenceless, those most unable to protect themselves, had to be helped, had to be protected, that this was part of the king's role and calling, and so part of his kingdom and part of what he expects of his subjects, you and I as well.

And so, we are reminded that they are 'precious' verse 14, those who suffer from oppression and violence, those who are needy and weak, that 'precious is their blood' or is their life to him. And we know this of our Saviour, we know he speaks of His father, whom he represents on earth, Jesus speaks of the Father saying he knows how many hairs upon our head, he speaks of a Father who so loves us that he gives his Son for this world, for you and I, for the weak the oppressed, the needy.

But first comes that righteousness and why I'm kind of labouring this point is that if we are going to change our way of life, if we are going to give ourselves for the purposes of God, if we are even going to learn what way is, then we need that righteousness - not just that right relationship with God, but to train us in his way of righteousness, to train us in his ways, to have his heart.

And to have that, as 2nd Timothy 3:16 says, teaching, training, maturing us in righteousness – that we need God to help us see the ways that we're just not seeing what he is about, we're just not seeing his priorities, we need to be taught and rebuked and we need to be corrected and trained in his ways - not just to be a nice person but to love with a radical, dangerous, even zealous love we might say.

And I think part of why this is on my heart just now is another book I was reading in my week off, and I've been reading it for a while, is a book I was recommended, that I've heard many people speak of it, and a number of people follow the author online.

Wow, it's an incredible book, emotionally charged because of the topic but what he writes, and he was a missionary so he's steeped in the scriptures, but his understanding of God's ways, of His righteousness is second to none, particularly in this subject matter and so I'll finally give you the name and title, it's Krish Kandiah, and his book is 'Home for Good: making a difference for children in need' and he's writing particularly about fostering and adoption, in particular in the UK. He is a British Christian and he is part of a campaign called 'Home for Good' which is seeking to encourage the church to consider how it might support and get involved with adoption and fostering. There's so much in the book that that really struck me, but I guess one of the things that's kind of stuck with me a little bit is that we often look for ways, I guess in our context: how can we show the world that we care, that Jesus makes a difference? What is the issue of our time that can speak to our nation, can be prophetic to them, can help them see the ways of God and the love of God? And Krish makes a very convincing case for adoption and fostering to be that way and he said something that was really profound and striking for me. He said that if one family or one individual in every church in the UK was to get involved in adoption or fostering and be supported

by their church family then the church alone could eradicate the need of and the lack of fostering homes and adoption homes in the UK. And I wondered, does that stack up? And so I know from Falkirk Council that they need something like forty five fostering places and then for Falkirk Presbytery alone of the Church of Scotland there are 35 churches. There must be at least another ten in the Falkirk area, we've got a couple just up the road in Madison for example. So easily the church could meet that need. So I'm just throwing it out there in case it speaks to someone and because as you as you read the Psalms and God's ways, meeting the needs of the needy, who could be more 'needy' verse 4 'saving the children of the needy' as Krish clearly paints in this book - these desperately needy children and maybe part of how the kingdom comes in our time is that disciples like you and I allow God's Spirit to convict us, to challenge us, to rebuke us, even correct us, to train us in righteousness and the ways of God that we might take that zealous, dangerous, risky step of faith and open our homes to the children who are desperately in need. I wonder if that's how the justice and righteousness of God in our time comes to fruition and the kingdom is extended - not to convert these children, to love them. We don't turn them into a project, but we love them, and we evidence that God is on the move.

But you know, this is all quite challenging. How do we see this come about? How do we have the strength, the courage, to take such steps? How do we see God's kingdom come through us? Well on Sunday we spoke about praying 'thy kingdom come' but Sunday was also Pentecost, and I just didn't have the time or the space to weave in a whole other thread, so forgive me that I missed an incredibly important aspect of how the kingdom comes. But I wanted to focus on Sunday on the kingdom, on praying for the kingdom.

But as we pray the Lord's Prayer, as we pray thy kingdom come, we open ourselves up to the influence of the Spirit - for him to identify the ways that we need to grow and change and get to know God better, and so often the church entwines praying for the kingdom with praying for the coming of the Spirit. Because it's only going to be by the Spirit working in us and through us that that we will see the kingdom come. We have to break this idea in the Western Church and especially I'm afraid in the Church of Scotland, that if we somehow have the resources, that if we were just clever enough or creative enough or strategic enough or have good enough management or enough money or a good enough building that it's all going to fall into place. Because I don't know about you, but I'm not very good at changing people's hearts, I'm not really very good at changing people's minds, and I'm not very good at making people become less of a sinner. I don't know how you are, I just know that I'm not very good at it and that's because these things are the work of God's Spirit. And so we need to be praying thy kingdom come and come Holy Spirit upon us, upon our area, upon our nation because we can't do it in our own strength – as the prophet Zechariah reminds us (chapter 4 verse 6) that is not by our strength not by our own might but by the Spirit that God's kingdom comes.

One of my favourite letters about the Spirit is Ephesians because Paul speaks of the Spirit there so much and so if you're wanting ideas of things to be praying about in relation to the Spirit go there. For I realise the Spirit is not the person of God that we feel most comfortable with. God the Father, yes, Jesus, sure, but with the Spirit we often feel like, "Who and what does he do?" So often we call him an "it" which really

we shouldn't because it sounds like we're just making the Spirit into a force like in Star Wars but the Spirit is a person, a "he".

Paul, who is so steeped in God's ways, has as these prayers laced throughout the verses of, such as Ephesians 1 verse 17: that 'the Spirit of wisdom and revelation would be given so that you may know God better', get to know our Heavenly Father better. Or what about in chapter 3? Praying for the Spirit to be given so we would have strength through his power, the power of the Spirit, 'in our inner being so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith': that he would be a home in our inner person, in our hearts and our souls and our minds and so he would rule there and lead us in his ways of righteousness that bring His compassion, that bring his justice his righteousness and so His kingdom would come in our midst and through our lives.

Understandably then Paul speaks in chapter five verse 18 that we are not to get drunk on wine not to get drunk in alcohol not to give way to that, but to 'be filled with the Spirit' – we are to keep being filled with the Spirit, asking to be filled with the Spirit: "God fill me with your Spirit so that your kingdom would come, that I might know you better, that I may embody the love of Jesus, that I may embody his justice and his righteousness that compassion would flow, that justice would flow, that your wholeness would come in my life and through my life to others".

Again thinking about the work of the Strategy Group we have very deliberately in the four values that we're beginning to test and suggest, everyone mentions the Spirit because of this, because it's not feasible by us in our own strength, or by our own resources. And it's not even just by having His Word, because his word is alive and active because of the Spirit, breathing it to being in the first place through the various writers and it is the Spirit that makes it alive and active and sharper than any sword, piercing to the very core of our being - the Spirit upon the Word and through the people of God to bring the righteousness, to bring the kingdom, of God in our lives, in our midst, that the blessing of God, the wholeness of God may come to our parish, to our nation, to you and I, to our families and friends.

My friends, do you long for this? Then pray thy kingdom come, come Holy Spirit. So, why don't we take some time to do that just know? Let us pray.