

Sunday 4 February 2024 Epiphany 5

10am Cooma, 1145 Bredbo, 4pm Adaminaby

Hymn - Praise to the living God!

Praise to the living God! All praise be to his Name
Who was, and is, and is to be, and still the same.
The one eternal God before what now appears,
the first, the last, Beyond all thought
His timeless years!

Formless, all lovely forms Declare his loveliness;
Holy, no holiness of earth Can his express.
Before the Lord of all. Creation speaks his praise,
And everywhere above, below,
His will obeys.

God's spirit freely flows, High surging where it will:
In prophet's word he spoke of old, is speaking still.
Established is God's law, And changeless it shall stand,
Deep written on the human heart,
On sea, on land.

God has eternal life Implanted in the soul;
His love shall be our strength and stay While ages roll.
Praise to the living God! All praise be to his Name
Who was, and is, and is to be,
and still the same.

The Grace

of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you.
And also with you.

'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'

Jesus said: 'This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

Lord have mercy on us, and write your law in our hearts by your Holy Spirit.

Sentence of the Day

11 He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables. Mark 4:11

Prayer of Preparation

**Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and
worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Prayer of the Day

Saving God

whose Son, Jesus, revealed the secret of the Kingdom of God to his disciples; inspire us, his disciples and citizens of your kingdom, so that we may constantly proclaim his gospel by our words and by the dedication and integrity of our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

Isaiah 6:8 -13

8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" 9 He said, "Go and tell this people: "Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never

perceiving.' 10 Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." 11 Then I said, "For how long, Lord?" And he answered: "Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, 12 until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. 13 And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land."

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

Psalms 147:1-11

1 Praise the LORD. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!

2 The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel.

3 He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

4 He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.

5 Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.

6 The LORD sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground.

7 Sing to the LORD with grateful praise; make music to our God on the harp.

8 He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills.

9 He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call.

10 His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the legs of the warrior;

11 the LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.

Revelation 12:10-12

10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. 11 They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. 12 Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

Mark 4:1-23

1 Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. 2 He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: 3 "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times." 9 Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear." 10 When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. 11 He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables 12 so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!" 13 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? 14 The farmer sows the word. 15 Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. 16 Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. 17 But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. 18 Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; 19 but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for

other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. 20 Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.”

21 He said to them, “Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its stand? 22 For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.”

This is the gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ**

Sermon - The Kingdom of God

Question Time

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Prayers of the People

Let us pray for the world and the church

Response: Christ Jesus, intercede for us, and in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray,

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Scripture Sentence

Jesus said: A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you. John 13.34

Prayer of Approach

We do not presume to come to your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table. But you are the same Lord whose nature is always to have mercy. Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.

The Confession

God is steadfast in love and infinite in mercy, welcoming sinners and inviting them to the Lord's table.

Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, confident in God's forgiveness.

Merciful God, our maker and our judge, we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, and in what we have failed to do: we have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves; we repent, and are sorry for all our sins.

Father, forgive us. Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty God, who has promised forgiveness to all who turn to him in faith: pardon you and set you free from all your sins, strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Greeting of Peace

We are the body of Christ. **His Spirit is with us.**

The peace of the Lord be always with you. **And also with you.**

Hymn - Fairest Lord Jesus

Fairest Lord Jesus, Lord of all creation,
Son of God, and Mary's son:
you will I cherish, you will I honour,
you are my soul's delight and crown.

Fair are the meadows, fairer still the woodlands
robed in the greenness and bloom of spring:
Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer,
he makes the saddest heart to sing.

Fair are the flowers, fairer still the children
in all the freshness of youth arrayed;
yet is their beauty fading and fleeting;
Lord Jesus, yours will never fade.

Fair is the moonlight, fairer still the sunshine,
fair is the shimmering starry sky:
Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines clearer
than all the heavenly host on high.

Jesus, all beauty, heavenly and earthly,
in you is wondrously found to be;
none can be nearer, fairer or dearer
than you, my Saviour, are to me.

Thanksgiving for Offering

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have gifts to share. Accept and use our offerings for your glory and for the service of your kingdom.

Blessed be God for ever.

The Great Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

All glory and honour be yours always and everywhere, mighty Creator, everliving God.

We give you thanks and praise for your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, who by the power of your Spirit was born of Mary and lived as one of us. By his death on the cross, he offered the one true sacrifice for sin, and obtained an eternal deliverance for his people.

Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Merciful God, we thank you for these gifts of your creation, this bread and wine, and we pray that by your Word and Holy Spirit, we who eat and drink them may be partakers of Christ's body and blood.

On the night he was betrayed Jesus took bread; and when he had given you thanks he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take, eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

After supper, he took the cup, and again giving you thanks he gave it to his disciples, saying, Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Therefore we do as our Saviour has commanded: proclaiming his offering of himself made once for all upon the cross, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension, and looking for his coming again, we celebrate, with this bread and this cup, his one perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Renew us by your Holy Spirit, unite us in the body of your Son and bring us with all your people into the joy of your eternal kingdom; through Jesus

Christ our Lord, with whom, and in whom, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, we worship you, Father, in songs of never-ending praise:

Blessing and honour and glory and power are yours for ever and ever. Amen.

The Holy Communion

As this broken bread was once many grains, which have been gathered together and made one bread: so may your Church be gathered from the ends of the earth into your kingdom.

The gifts of God for the people of God

Come let us take this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in remembrance that he died for us, and feed on him in our hearts with thanksgiving.

The Lord's Supper is open to all who love the Lord

Grape juice is available.

Please come to the Communion Rail if you are able, observing appropriate social distancing.

After Communion

Gracious God, we thank you that in this sacrament you assure us of your goodness and love. Accept our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving and help us to grow in love and obedience that we may serve you in the world and finally be brought to that table where all your saints feast with you for ever.

Father, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord. Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen

Notices

Hymns - Fight the good fight

**Fight the good fight with all thy might,
Christ is thy strength, and Christ thy right;
lay hold on life, and it shall be
thy joy and crown eternally.**

**Run the straight race through God's good grace,
lift up thine eyes, and seek his face;
life with its way before us lies;
Christ is the path, and Christ the prize.**

**Cast care aside; and on thy Guide
lean, and his mercy will provide,
lean, and the trusting soul shall prove
Christ is its life, and Christ its love.**

**Faint not, nor fear; his arm is near;
he changes not, and thou art dear;
only believe, and thou shalt see
that Christ is all in all to thee.**

Blessing

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen**

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord:

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Sermon - The Kingdom of God - Mark 4:1-33

[Note we didn't read verses 24-33 this morning, please read them yourselves]

Introduction

'Who likes a good mystery book or movie? I am more into action novels and films, but often these cross over the mystery genre. Our bible readings today talk about a mystery: the mystery, or the secret of the Kingdom of God. While the NIV which we read refers to the secret of the Kingdom of God, the original Greek uses the word *musterion*, from which we get the English word mystery. The word refers to things that are hidden, or not obvious to everyone. These were often revealed to a select few, such as those initiated into what were known as mystery religions, which were quite popular in Jesus's day.

Kingdoms

Before we look at the secret of the kingdom of God, I want to think a bit about what a kingdom is.

We tend to think of human kingdoms as tied to specific geographical locations, or perhaps to specific groups of people, or citizens. As an example, you might think of the kingdom of Morocco, and think of the geographical country known as Morocco, or the group of people known as Moroccans. However, another way of thinking about it is that a kingdom is the rule of the king or monarch. Obviously a monarch rules over a population, and within a geographical region, but it is helpful to think about how the monarch rules. The preferred way to rule in modern society is by written law defined by the government and ratified by a head of state, such as a monarch or president, but this is not the only way. We will look at how God rules his kingdom as we work through this passage.

Parable of the Soils

The first section of our gospel this morning is the parable of the soils, sometimes known as the parable of seeds. I'm sure you are familiar with it - a farmer sows seeds that land with different soils which affect whether the seeds survive and grow. Only seeds that land on good soil survive for long and multiply.

Jesus explains this parable to his disciples, saying the seed is his word. Different people correspond to different soils and respond to the word differently. Satan can take the word away, as can trouble or persecution, and the worries of this world can make the seed unfruitful.

God's Kingdom is where people hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.

If we think in terms of God's kingdom being God's rule, citizenship in God's Kingdom is offered through his word, and people respond by accepting his rule in their lives, or not if they are like the path. If they are like the rocky or the thorny ground they respond, but only briefly before they fall away.

The implication is that not everyone in a geographical region, or even a defined people group are citizens of God's kingdom, but only those who accept, and continue to accept God's rule. Also, those who do accept God's rule have their own tools to play in sharing God's word with others, and inviting them to accept it and become citizens.

The Parable of the Lantern

This is what the second parable, the parable of the lantern, is about. Citizens of God's kingdom are not supposed to keep quiet about it. They are supposed to share the word, the incision to that kingdom so that it can multiply. By again the word of the kingdom, they can multiply it 30, 60, or even a hundred times.

The Parable of the Growing Seed

The next parable is the parable of the growing seed. This parable says that even a very little thing, like sharing God's word, can have a huge impact on God's kingdom, even though we may not see it doing its work. As we share God's word as the previous parable encourages us, it will work invisibly in the hearts and minds of those who hear. In some cases it may be stolen away by Satan or the troubles of this world, but even so, others may water that seed until it becomes ripe, ready for harvest, or full acceptance of God's rule and citizenship in his kingdom.

The Parable of the Growing Seed

The final paragraph emphasises potential growth - as the word is sown and gradually grows invisibly, the tiny effort of sharing God's word can have a completely disproportionate effect, as different as the smallest seed is to the largest tree.

The Secret of the Kingdom of God

So what is the secret, or mystery of the kingdom of God? This is the important question, and I must admit it has greatly confused me as I have prepared this sermon.

What has confused me was that Jesus seemed to be contrasting the parables that those on the outside heard with the explanations of the parables that he gave the twelve, and that these explanations were the secrets of the kingdom of God. This would imply that the secrets are that different people respond differently to the word, that the kingdom should not be hidden, that it grows gradually, and will eventually grow to massive size. While these are undoubtedly true, they don't strike me as great mysteries, or even the secret of the kingdom as Jesus describes it here.

Now, just because it doesn't seem right to me doesn't mean it isn't, but a careful reading of the text shows that Jesus isn't specifically saying it is so either, so we are allowed to look for another secret of the kingdom.

The key to understanding what the mystery is to understand what was revealed to the disciples and not to others. What was revealed to the 12 and not others? What differentiates the twelve from everyone who came before them? The main thing revealed to the apostles is of course Jesus himself. Of course others were aware of Jesus, but only the apostles knew Jesus by living with the adult Jesus just about 24/7. As well, even though it had not happened at that point, the 12 were the ones to whom it was revealed that Jesus was the Messiah and would die and be raised again to save them. I think this is a better candidate for the secret of the kingdom.

In terms of the kingdom being God's rule, Jesus in his life, as well as his death was the only perfect example of being under God's rule. No one else ever had or ever would live a life completely under God's rule, and so Jesus is the mystery of the kingdom of God. He is the only example of true citizenship of that kingdom, as the only way sinful humans can become citizens, through faith in him.

Those outside the Kingdom

If understanding what the secret of the kingdom isn't hard enough. Jesus's next statement is even harder. Jesus says: to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"

Surely God wants everyone to be forgiven, so why does he hide the secret from them so they can't turn and be forgiven? Theologians have debated this question ever since Jesus said it, and have come up with all sorts of answers. Part of the answer relates

to when the quote was said originally by Isaiah to the rebellious nation of Israel. The sad fact was that the life they were leasing manifestly demonstrated they weren't ready to hear the gospel, or the repentance it required of them. Similarly, Jesus listeners outside the 12 weren't ready either.

Another part of the answer was that they couldn't be ready as Jesus used not yet died and risen again. If his listeners did hear and tried to live as citizens of God's kingdom in their own strength, by law keeping, they would inevitably fail. They needed to witness Jesus' perfect life and his death and resurrection in their place to repent and basin the forgiveness they required as citizens.

Conclusion

This brings us to ourselves, today. We have the example of Christ's sinless life, and we know of his death in our place. We know of these through the word we have heard, preached to us through the ages. Many of us have responded as the good soil, scripting the message and producing a good crop.

Are you certain of your citizenship of God's kingdom? I can assure you that the seed has been shown in you because you have heard the word, from me and no doubt others in this place. Perhaps there have been times when Satan has sought to steal the word away, or troubles or persecution caused you to fall away, or the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things choked the word. These may have happened, but today you can make a fresh start, let the seed grow fully in your lives.

Whether it is a fresh start, or you have been steadily continuing in your Christian lives, confident in the word, then you need to place your lantern on its lampstand, let your light, Gods word be seen by those around you, and play your part in the kingdoms growth as it grows from the little mustard seed of your faith to the largest tree of all, encompassing the whole earth until Jesus returns with the harvest and we see God's kingdom in its ultimate perfection, rather than sprouting and growing almost imperceptibly add it is now.

Those who have ears, let them hear.