**Sermon – Proper 12A 2020** *(Pastor Peter)*

*(1 Kings 3:5-12; Psalm 119:129-136; Romans 8:2-39; Matthew 13:31-33,44-52)*

*Matthew 13:44*

***The kingdom of heaven is like treasure…***

Dear Lord, as we reflect on your Kingdom and your authority in our life, open our hearts and minds to receive your word so that we might live in accordance with your will. Speak to us your truth, for this your word is truth. Amen.

One of the first things anyone does when they plan to travel (in Australia or to another country) is to source information of what they might see or encounter in their visit.

This coming week Lois and I plan to take some holidays and travel north (where it’s a little warmer), and so we’ve been doing a bit of research about what to expect and what we might need for our trip.

If you are not prepared for your visit, it can become a negative experience. We are planning that fuel and food and accommodation will be more expensive than in Perth. We anticipate long days of driving (which we both enjoy). We will pack clothes for hot and cold weather, knowing that climate can change significantly in two weeks. And we will travel with an open mind to encounter the unexpected or unplanned, and so as to not get overly frustrated or disappointed.

If you’ve ever travelled overseas, you will know that even more preparation is needed. Passports and visas and different currencies need to be arranged. And it’s always helpful to try and learn what you can about the culture and attitudes and customs of the country to where you will be travelling as a way of showing sensitivity and respect to their way of doing things. And even attempting to learn some basic phrases in the local language, is generally highly appreciated.

And even if you are well prepared through lots of reading and research it’s likely that you will still experience some form of culture shock, or possibly return- culture shock after your travels. Culture shock is even experienced possible in Australian travel, but perhaps to a lesser degree. Homesickness, sadness and frustration, boredom and withdrawal, a desire to sleep too much or too little Lack of motivation, depression, anger, feeling vulnerable, resentment, can all be symptoms of culture shock.

Now what’s all this got to do with today’s Bible readings?

Why am I talking about travel and culture shock?

For the past three Sunday’s we’ve been listening to parables of Jesus from Matthew, chapter 13 about the Kingdom of heaven / the Kingdom of God. And from Paul’s Letter to the Romans, chapter 8 concerning life in God’s Spirit.

Both of these chapters in the Bible give us a picture of what we should expect when we live in God’s Kingdom under the jurisdiction of God’s Spirit. It’s a complete contrast to life in this world without God’s rule of spirit. Saint Paul gives a good comparison of these two different worlds and ways of living in his letter to the Galatians where he writes, ‘***16So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh / ‘this world’. 17For ‘this world’ desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to this world. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want… 19The acts of ‘this world’ are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.***

***22But life in God’s Spirit produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law… 25Since we live in the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”*** *(Galatians 5:16ff)*

When Matthew was writing his gospel account, he was wanting to teach his audience (his fellow Jews) what it looked like to live in God’s Kingdom, and contrast it to how the Jews were living in his day. Matthew Chapter 13 is like a traveller’s guide to the Kingdom of God and gives glimpses into what they can expect if they choose to live there.

In the chapters leading up to this, we heard how the Jews were tired and weary from trying to keep all the laws that the Jewish leaders were burdening and oppressing them. (Matt 11:28-29) They were harassed and helpless; like sheep without a shepherd. (Matt 9:36). So Jesus invites the Jews to come to him for rest, and to take up their cross and follow him. (Matt 10:38-39)

So what should we expect if we are to live in God’s Kingdom and under his rule?

Two Sunday’s ago, we heard how God is generous and inclusive in the parable of the seed sown on different kinds of soil. We learnt that God sows the seed of his word (his love and forgiveness and compassion) on anyone who would receive it. On people who are hard-hearted, among people who’s lives are rocky and shallow, among those who live in dark and thorny communities who are being chocked by the worries and troubles of life, and among those who will flourish and produce the harvest of love and service that God desires. God doesn’t pick and choose his children favouring some and excluding others. He warmly and lovingly invites anyone to be part of his kingdom.

The last Sunday we learnt that God is not quick to judge, but is patient and generous, allowing the wheat and the weeds to grow alongside of each other, and only dividing among the two when it’s time for the harvest on the last day. To us this is frustrating and not how we think a gardener should behave. But we need to remember, as Isaiah writes, that “God’s ways are not our ways and his thought are not our thoughts” (Is 55:8).

But this is God’s kingdom and not our kingdom. Just like when you visit another country to need to remember that you must abide by their laws and not what you think the laws should be.

And now from today’s Gospel reading we learn a few more things about God’s kingdom. Some people think that God’s kingdom is insignificant like a small seed, but in fact the impact and power of this kingdom is far greater that anyone could imagine. It’s big enough to shelter and provide relief for the ‘birds of the air’ / people from all over the world. It’s influence is like yeast that makes bread rise; even though only a little is used, it will impact the whole loaf.

The kingdom is something that we should treasure, so much so that we are willing let go of (get rid of) everything this world has to offer in order to be able to buy and claim this kingdom for ourselves.

And it’s not just for an exclusive few, or a particular people of class or wealth or intellect. But it’s for all kinds of ‘fish’ / people.

Saint Paul also helps us to understand that life in God’s kingdom is a joy to behold. He reminds his readers in his letter to the Romans that once you’ve been welcomed in through God’s Kingdom through baptism into Jesus (Rm 6:3) , there is no condemnation (8:1)– no one can judge you or tell you that you don’t belong. Because God’s Spirit is now at work in you to shape you and lead you and guide you in how you should live (8:9).

This doesn’t mean that we will get everything right or perfect, because even though we live by the Spirit, we still have weeds growing around us and wanting to choke us and suffocate us (8:19-21). This suffering can be overwhelming, but that’s why the Spirit steps in and interceded for us. He takes our sighs and groans and translates them to God as our prayers to help us in our weakness (8:26-27). Weakness doesn’t mean you don’t belong to God’s Kingdom, it simply means that your hope for eternity is not founded on yourself, but on God (8:24-25).

And so, with such a hope in this broken and sin-filled world we take comfort in the fact that we belong to God in his kingdom. Even though we face death all day long (8:36) we are actually ‘conquerors’ in Christ Jesus, who has won the victory for us (8:38-39).

Take heart my friends, God has brought you into his kingdom through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, His Son, Our Lord and Saviour; and now you can rest assured that nothing will be able to separate you from this love that is growing in you now unto eternal life.

That is God’s promise to you, and to everyone who lives in his Kingdom, under his rule and Spirit. Amen.