

Lent 1. St Thomas on the Bourne  
2018

18<sup>th</sup> Feb.

The time is fulfilled the Kingdom of `God has come near repent and believe the good news.

I wonder what comes into your mind when you hear the word Kingdom?

Last weekend by a strange quirk of fate we had a very full what you might call a kingdom weekend in London.

Amongst other things we had a guided tour of Westminster Abbey (for many the spiritual heart of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth).

We went to see the film Darkest Hour (a wonderful film about Churchill's struggle to rouse his party and the nation who were facing the threat of imminent invasion)

And if that wasn't enough we then found ourselves in the public gallery of the Supreme Court the highest court of the United Kingdom just opposite the Abbey.

It was a very full weekend. These three experiences which we enjoyed enormously are great examples of some of the most famous institutions and individuals of our own kingdom

But whatever we think about the traditions the strengths and weaknesses of our kingdom Mark in today's gospel reading is talking about a different kingdom. The Kingdom of God.

That is not to say that there are not links between the Kingdom of God and our Kingdom. In the Lords' Prayer we pray "Your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven." Can we see any signs of God's Kingdom in The Abbey, Churchill the Supreme Court?

I believe we can. The memorials and tombs in the Abbey recognise the lives of many men and women kings and queens who have made a distinguished contribution to our nation. Often at great cost they have been champions in the fields of science the arts music dance and many others.

But above all the Abbey is a place where God is worshipped every day in the prayers and services which are offered. It is a place where the achievements of the past are honoured but primarily it is a living worshipping community.

The Abbey like any church is called on to be a sign of God's kingdom the achievements of those of those remembered wonderful signs of the kingdom but they are not the kingdom – nor is the church for all its wonderful worship and music the perfect embodiment of the kingdom. We hardly need reminding of the many scandals that have rocked it in recent years let alone those of the past.

So too with my second example of a sign. Churchill a fantastic wartime leader full of courage in fighting evil in our darkest hour but like us a human being with plenty of contradictions failures and shortcomings.

And thirdly The Supreme Court. A wonderful example of God's work being done through the country's most senior and experienced judges working independently of the politicians and called upon to interpret the law, make judgements and seek truth in the most complicated and controversial cases. Again their work is I believe a sign of God's Kingdom. But the judges are human and their decisions may ultimately be the wrong ones – God alone knows.

So, what is this Kingdom of God that we hear so much about in the Gospels? It's always revolves around some words or deeds of Jesus. In the Gospel of Mark K of G it is mentioned 14 times

It's coming. - "The K of G has come near."

It's peculiarities. - "To you has been given the secret of the K of G"

To whom it belongs. - "Let the children come to me for to such belongs the K of G "

Difficulty in entering the K of G. - "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the K of G."

When Mark talks about the K of God he's not talking about a place but about Kingship or God's reign or God's sovereignty K of G is not a place or an institution but a power. - God's dynamic power to put right all that is wrong in this world.

So we should give thanks whenever we see signs of "God's sovereignty" "reign" "kingship" being honoured being active or being sought for in the world- "your kingdom come" we are called not only to pray it but to look for it and to live it.

And if we look and have open hearts and minds we do see (even if they cannot) that living out God's sovereignty in so many ways in the lives of communities, charitable organisations, individuals, churches and yes other faiths and those whose faith is known only to God.

But they are signs they are not the whole picture. Signs usually have cracks sometimes very substantial ones. Oxfam which does such outstanding work in so many countries have made bad mistakes in failing to report some individuals who have been involved in sexual abuse. That does not negate all the fantastic work they do - in what Jesus said are signs for the kingdom. i.e. Caring for the poor, the homeless the orphans, the widows. So too the Church is a seriously cracked vessel -

the Good Friday Collect prays “Almighty God Look with mercy on your broken body the Church.:

So Where does that leave us?

The Gospels tell us that God’s reign rule sovereignty is mysteriously coming to birth- breaking forth in this person Jesus. That reign of God; that sovereignty of God; that rule of God or as today’s Gospel says the K of God has come near.

Mark doesn’t mince his words “The time is fulfilled”. This is a huge moment this is not calendar of clock time, but this is a critical time this is D Day and this time is filled to fullness.

God has set the kingdom into motion.

The Baptism of Jesus is the endorsement that In Jesus God’s Rein Rule Sovereignty Kingdom Has begun. “You are my Son the Beloved with you I am well pleased” But bringing in that kingdom will be tough it was for Jesus and it will be for us. Mark underlines he points - immediately after his Baptism Jesus was driven out - cast out into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan.

So how should we respond to this D Day of God - this announcement that God has set his kingship into motion?

Mark challenges us - we are to “Repent and believe in the Good News

That doesn’t mean feeling miserable and po faced over our sins or regretting that we haven’t been more religious. To repent **metataoein** is to turn around 180 degrees from the kingdoms of our own making to God’s correcting power.

Believe in the good news – trust in the good news, not just in our heads but in our guts. Trust that God is able to forgive our sins, that he is able to carry us through the squalls of life. Trust that despite our weaknesses and shortcomings and failures to live out his kingship in our lives his grace is able to turn that wheel of repentance a few degrees and in the fullness of time - God willing -180 degrees.

Lent is a good time to practise turning.