

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity - 12<sup>th</sup> July 2020 - Genesis 25:19-end; Psalm 119:105-end; Romans 8:1-11; Matt 13:1-9 and 18-23

**Your Word is a lantern to my feet and a light upon my path  
Psalm 119:105**

**Reimagining the future...**

I took Ellie's advice last Sunday and listened to John Bell and the Iona Community lead Sunday Worship on Radio 4 the week before. John Bell's suggestion was profound – he invited the people of God to reimagine the future. Let me be clear... he was not saying, let's do things differently. He was saying there is an imperative, flowing down through the centuries from Genesis, via the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, to reimagine the future. It is true, when the peoples of the whole world are faithful and secure in God's loving kindness, there will be a reimagined future: a new heaven and a new earth, the worlds of God's heart, of Jesus' kingdom on Earth and of a Holy Spirit filled economy of justice and reconciliation. If, as children of God, we do not believe this, when and how can it happen?

As children of God, we are invited to daily reimagine this future; not to do differently what we already know but to listen to truths about ourselves we may not want to hear. This new heaven and new earth for example is not for me! It's not for you! It is for us, for everyone, for all nations as the Psalms constantly repeat. For 'everyone' reimagined surely means **all** peoples, regardless of all the labels we pretend are acceptable: those of colour, faith, ability or gender. For 'everyone' reimagined means **all** who breathe and love and live this gift we call LIFE and Jesus calls God's heart, God's Kingdom. This is what I heard from John Bell and hear from today's readings, which also ask us to reimagine the future.

In Genesis 1 the world was a void over which God breathed and the Spirit hovered. God reimagined the future and the Earth breathed it's first. Isaac reimagined the future too. Rebekah was unable to have children, until he prayed. Rebekah then 'inquired of the Lord' because she was scared about the struggles going on inside her body. Esau was Isaac's favourite because, maybe, he was like his Dad. Jacob was Rebekah's favourite. Was he like her or was it because of what she had heard from God about the future reimagined? In the normal run of events the eldest son inherited his father's life, land and wealth. But Jacob reimagined the future...with himself as the heir. It took a hungry brother and one meal to reconfigure what happened next.

So, how did Jesus reimagine the future? He spent the first 30 years of his life listening and learning, watching and waiting. When the time was right, he was baptised, began to teach, preach, heal and to encourage and

empower Gentiles, women and those who had different abilities as well as the Jewish nation into which he had been born.

Jesus used parables, short stories and picture images, to awaken his listeners' imaginations. He used vivid cultural images, relying on their sustaining power in people's hearts. Parables are a maze or a map which reveal that searching is the imperative. Parables were Jesus' way of teaching his listeners not how to think but just to think. **Consider** the lilies of the field, he said; **why** search for the lost coin or a pearl of great price? And today, he asks us to reimagine the future using this seedy parable.

When you have something important to say, how you say it is worth thinking about. With such a large crowd on the beach, Jesus wanted everyone to hear so he used the amphitheatre of the boat on the lake for great acoustics! Enthralling but also challenging his audience, Jesus seemed to be saying, 'Yes, it's okay to waste lots of seed'. But seed was precious in that community. A seed sower would surely know the best and the worst places to sow; seed would never be thrown on a path, on rocky ground or among thorns. So, what did Jesus want the ears of his listeners to hear?

I know this answer for me, but not for you. It is your ears which need to work out its meaning for you. Maybe you could take intentional time out to imagine you were there on the beach, listening to Jesus... Or, see yourself in one of the groups in the icon Ian has put up for us this morning...which group resonates with you?

Don't leave worship this morning and forget this. Read Matthew 25 again, including the verses we have not read, then consider, reflect, ponder...what is Jesus offering you for a reimagined future?

It is only when we, collectively, turn to face Jesus on our knees, as in the icon, that we continue preparing good soil for God's seeds to fall into. Our searching for the seeds already growing in good soil is the imperative John Bell spoke about so that we can throw in our seeds and wait, as patiently as God waits. Then the new heaven and new earth will draw nearer because that is God's generational promise to us.

Let us pray: **Your Word is a lantern to my feet and a light upon my path. O Lord, encourage and empower us, your children, to be authentic preparers of soil and generous seed sowers in your reimagined future, through Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Janet Clarke

I invite you to look at an icon of this parable, by Helen Protopapadaki:



The iconographer has pictured four scenarios with varying degrees of turning towards Jesus. Take a look at each group and consider:

- which group is living for the moment, representing the Evil one who comes and snatches away what was sown in the heart? Pathway seeds.
- Which group is living with heavy burdens and despair represented by hearing good news, receiving it joyfully but, having shallow roots, falling away when under pressure? Rocky ground seeds.
- Which group is living for wealth and future wealth represented by hearing good news but, the cares of world and the lure of wealth means no harvest is possible? Thorny ground seeds.
- Which group has looked, seen the reality of life as it is and chosen to say sorry by turning their faces towards Jesus represented by those hearing good news, working hard to understand it, then taking action and bearing fruit, 100-fold, 60, 30-fold?

If you were to reimagine a new heaven and a new earth through God's eyes, which scenario offers you a glimpse into God's Kingdom for a fruitful future on Earth?