

The Challenge to Build the Kingdom

JRR Tolkein lived through the first world war, in fact he fought at the Battle of the Somme. He later went on to write his classic books "The Hobbit", and "Lord of the Rings", which is largely regarded as one of the great works of English literature. One of their most distinctive themes is the reality of evil. But another important theme is that he chooses the weak and powerless to change the world for the better. Bilbo and Frodo Baggins are hobbits, who are little people, but they are the ones who in the end make the difference. They may feel that they are part of a story too big for them, yet they grow to take up their places within it.

Do we not feel like them often, what can we do to change the world? What can we do to make a difference to the environment in which we live?

JRR Tolkein was spot on, addressing the needs of his generation in the aftermath of the First World War, heading towards the Second World War. It's easy to be overwhelmed by a sense of despair and powerlessness, as we contemplate a world that we seem incapable of redirecting towards the good.

Yet, as Tolkein so clearly saw, we need a vision of the good, and a sense of empowerment in the midst of our weakness if anything is to be changed. Tolkein was a Christian and he drew his inspiration from his faith.

Today's Parable of the Wheat and Weeds in Matthew 13, is relevant for every generation particularly ours today.

What does it tell us?

The Kingdom has come into the world through Jesus and his message of good news but the Kingdom has an enemy. Evil remains and is a constant challenge to the Kingdom of Heaven. What Jesus tells us in this parable, is that we have to live with this enemy, and it won't be until the end of the Age, that evil will be eventually uprooted.

In our world at the moment this parable is hugely significant, for as we look around there seems to be so much evil; we live in a world where there is great sense of impending doom. The world as we know it, faces disaster in many fronts; and yet in the Christ story, we have tremendous hope for the future; we must not despair, for we are people who live with hope and faith in God's good purposes for this world.

The issue of climate change caused by human greed and evil is high on the agenda.

Is there any hope?

There is one thing in human history that gives us hope, and changes everything, and that is the resurrection of Jesus. The first disciples encountered the shadow of death when Jesus was crucified; they huddled together in a room in fear of the Jews; they thought that their story had come to an end; their master had been crucified, and their world lost its meaning.

But the most dramatic event was about to happen. In the midst of despair and seeming helplessness, a light was to shine, and everything was about to change; a dramatic event that brought first astonishment and then hope; a real hope, in something and someone trustworthy. The tomb was empty, Jesus had risen!

Jesus came with a clear message and that message was the Kingdom of God had come into the world. He came to call people to follow him and help build God's Kingdom.

Who me? You may well ask, and the answer is yes, you!

He called fishermen, tax collector and those considered the little ones, the Bilbo and Frodo Baggins of this world, to join together to change the status quo, to bring light into darkness.

But he didn't call them to fight with weapons, he didn't call them to uproot the evil; he called them to show a different way to fight, and that was to respond with love, compassion, peace and empathy and so build Christ's Kingdom on earth.

His Kingdom, he said, was not of this world, it was a kingdom coming from heaven. The prayer that he taught his disciples was a prayer that pointed to another world, "Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done."

That's what the resurrection has done. It has brought the Kingdom of God into this world.

Friends, we face a great battle, and it's a battle to preserve God's creation; we have an enemy called evil, there is much evil, call it what you like...greed, power, rage... and we are not called to uproot it, rather we are called to live in a

different kingdom, under a different master, to be good stewards of this beautiful creation which is an image of the world yet to come.

Last Sunday evening, I was hooked on David Attenborough's brilliant new series Planet Earth 3, and the scene that really spoke to me, was the attack on the docile fur seals by the great white shark, what chance have those seals against the world's greatest predator?

As the great white shark moves in on its kill, the seals do something spectacular, they turn on their enemy, the numbers of fur seals grow in number and confidence; the tables turn, by sheer number, those defenceless fur seals, drive the world's most notorious predator, back out to sea. That spoke to me of the challenge that we face today, with all the predators in this world; the way to confront them, is to come together and work together for one common purpose, and that purpose of growing the Kingdom of God, then evil will be pushed back. Love will always triumph over evil.

Our missionary partner in Israel and Palestine Rev Muriel Pearson has been flown back to Scotland for her own safety; she attended our Presbytery World Mission committee meeting last week, and she updated us on the situation; she finished by saying that she received a circular letter sent to pastors in the Middle East from Christians in Gaza, that if they didn't speak up for a cease fire, then they were complicit with the evil that's been done.

Strong words, and a call for us all to swim together. It's a call for us to be the Bilbo and Frodo Baggins, the little people standing up and tackling the big issues of climate change and so grow the Kingdom of God in his world.

Cadder Church has Five Marks of Mission as its guiding star going forward. One of those marks is "Treasure" which is Caring and Treasuring God's Creation. Frank and his small team are working and developing ways of caring for creation; whether that's caring for hedgehogs or speaking out about the big issues that are destroying our world, they are also speaking for us. They would love others to come and join them, and help them move forward with this vital mark of mission. If anyone is interested in getting involved in their team and supporting their work, please see Frank or one of his team.

God is calling all his little ones to be the people who make the biggest difference in His Kingdom - Amen.