

The Kingdom of Heaven- Hidden yet revealed

In our worship today I have sought to bring a range of music from different cultures and lands. Yet in all of the music we have been blessed to hear and join in with praise of God. When we think of the Church building being opened 29 years ago tomorrow, we are reminded of a range of people who have been a part of the congregation.

There are stories of bringing in the haggis and a sword through the ceiling. There are stories of families from different pacific Islands, staying in the Wesley Apartments for long times, yet joining as they were able in the worship community. There has been the experience of Martin and Alice's children growing up in this church, not to mention the wonderful experiences with Sena, Devinda and Manesha and their baptism and work within the congregation. There have been the Welsh and Irish Sheilas, the very Scottish Mary from Open Door, Soo-Lin from China and so many others who have been and will always be a part of this community. And the joy of little Janet singing us Jesus loves me one Father's Day. There are many joys and many griefs that have been and will continue to be a part of this community. And all of this we celebrate.

Today we are thinking about different cultures. For me they bring not only amazing food but also different feelings to music. You see good songs don't just have to have good words that bring meaning to the singer but they also have to somehow evoke a feeling which matches the words. And where they go in the order of service matters as well. We have certainly had a range of music this morning from different parts of the world so I hope you get what I am talking about.

We have been following the story of Jacob for a few weeks now. And if there was music which was played for his life we would have had quite a variety already. Last week we remember how he lay down in the ruined city of Luz and had a dream about a ladder to heaven. I said that from then on the way he viewed life was changed.

Today we hear of Jacob whose name means 'deceiver' being deceived. He returned to his uncle Laban and fell in love with one of his cousins, Rachel. However she was the younger daughter and after 7 years of working for Laban so Jacob could marry Rachel he ends up married to Leah, the older sister. I love the description 'she had weak eyes' in the NIV version. However in the Hebrew it uses the word *Rkuth* which means tender. So Leah was *Rkuth* but Rachel was *iphth* which is Hebrew for Lovely.



To be deceived in such a way would perhaps make us very angry but Jacob was in love and was prepared to work another 7 years for Rachel. In the end we know that they were married and Jacob had 2 wives, but there was one that he really loved. We will hear more of this I am sure.

There are so many messages that can come from this story but it needs to be held with the gospel reading from Matthew where we have many different ideas about the kingdom of God. We come across a small mustard seed. We hear of yeast in bread. We hear of a treasure in a field and a pearl of great price. When people had discovered the great treasure they were prepared to sell everything that had to have it. They were prepared to work hard- like Jacob worked for 14 years to finally marry Rachel.

Usually the orthodox rabbis of Europe boasted distinguished rabbinical genealogies, but Rabbi Yechiel of Ostrowce was an exception. He was the son of a simple baker and he inherited some of the forthright qualities of a man of the people.

Once, when a number of rabbis had gathered at some festivity, each began to boast of his eminent rabbinical ancestors. When Rabbi Yechiel's turn came, he replied gravely, "In my family, I'm the first eminent ancestor."

His colleagues were shocked by this piece of impudence, but said nothing. Immediately after, the rabbis began to expound Torah. Each one was asked to hold forth on a text culled from the sayings of one of his distinguished rabbinical ancestors.

One after another the rabbis delivered their learned dissertations. At last it came time for Rabbi Yechiel to say something. He arose and said, "My masters, my father was a baker. He taught me that only fresh bread was appetizing and that I must avoid the stale. This can also apply to learning."

And with that Rabbi Yechiel sat down.

Too often our teaching or understanding of the scriptures is based on the past- and that is fine to some extent. But the kingdom of God is then something that is stuck 2,000 years ago. It is actually here today. We are so fortunate that we do not have to work to enter into the kingdom of God. It is our belief in Christ. But we are also very fortunate to have the opportunity to approach each day as a new day. The past helps inform the present but should never shackle the present.



We are facing significant change- in the world, in Australia and also in this congregation and the other congregations of Parramatta Mission. However, even when we feel afraid of change we need to remember- at some point in time a treasure needs to be made or found and then it needs to be shared. There are always new things, new treasures waiting to be revealed and waiting to be uncovered.

The Kingdom of God may be hidden from some- but in Jesus Christ it has been revealed. We have such a treasure that we need not hide it, rather we do need to share it. We can truly rejoice in ALL God has done for us, but even all the things which are yet to be revealed.

My prayer for you this week is that you might rediscover treasures from the past but you might see them anew and discover new treasures today. For thus is the kingdom of God.