

Welcome to Monday's podcast for the Thy Kingdom Come series recorded for the season between Ascension and Pentecost.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done. Don't we say these words often and easily? These are comfortable words. What does it mean and how is it done?

Some years ago I gave a talk for which I needed to construct something rather big to help get the message across more clearly. What I made was a large flat wooden heart painted in bright red gloss paint and split into two equal parts down the middle. It had brackets on the back so that each half could be attached onto either arm of a six foot wooden cross that we have at church. The end result was our cross holding the two large parts of this broken heart but in such a way that the two halves could slide together to make a complete and unbroken heart.

The intention was for a demonstration of 'Thy kingdom come' and God's will being done, in the healing of broken hearts. And it went well, everything went smoothly and nothing fell off. What I did next was more edgy and sparked a reaction both in the church and the town. More on that in just one moment.

Firstly, let me tell you of a message on our answer machine when I returned that morning from church. A church regular, a lady who has since moved away from the area, had left a message which went something like this: "Scott, I'm just back from church and I really liked your message this morning. Please could you give me a ring as soon as you get in?" Well, who wouldn't respond straight away to a nice message like that? I called the lady who wondered if I could possibly pop round and see her. She didn't live far away and I obliged going round straight away. She was delighted that I had come round and explained that she had seen this marvellous large wooden red heart, and the way that came in two parts that then became one part and it attached so smoothly onto the wooden cross. This, she said, was so clever and well put together. And then, she said, I realised, that you must be quite a practical sort of chap and perhaps you could help me. You see I've just bought this new Hoover from Argos and I cannot get it to work, could you possibly have a look at it for me?!

For the record, yes, my ego was bruised, and (somewhat to my surprise) I *did* get the Hoover to work!

What was the next thing I did with the heart on the cross back in the morning service? What else was there to say about the coming of God's kingdom, and the will of God being done? I had also put red Velcro pads placed all over both sides of the broken

heart. And onto these I attached signs, labels, names or types of people who both need and receive the love of God. The love of God is relentless and is offered to all. We say such things in church: The love of God is offered to all – which one of us would object to such a claim?

The signs were attached to the top of the heart and gradually more and more were added going down both sides until the heart was covered with those who are offered the love God through the will of God and the sacrifice of God's broken heart on the cross. The signs started with "You" and "Me", "Brother", "Sister", safe and comfortable. "Young", "Old", "Rich", "Poor", "Employed", "Unemployed", "Criminal", "Adulterer", "Burglar", "Prostitute", "Vandal", "Paedophile".

You can guess that there was a reaction to some of the labels chosen to go onto the heart of the cross. A reaction both in the church and in the town. To argue that the love of God is available to *all* these people - that's a real stumbling block on the journey of faith. Yet this is what the gospels claim. We state a belief in the kingdom of God shown through a love without limits. There are no bounds to the love of God. There are no limits to the love of God. And this love of God is relentless, it pursues us to the grave and beyond. It reaches out even to me and to you.

An elderly member of my family, who died some years ago, took issue with my faith. He *could* accept that there was a God but *not* the Christian God. He explained that he had tried in his long life to lead a good life, he had gone from school to work, had worked throughout his life, he had fulfilled his commitments, had kept his promises to his wife and family, but others hadn't. He knew others who had not worked hard or had not kept their vows or done their bit. What sort of God would love them, and forgive them? The God of the Prodigal Son was not a God for my elderly relative whose honesty I still admire.

One day I had a dream or a vision, call it what you like. The dream took me just beyond the time of my death. I had left *this* life - this tiny part of the Kingdom of God trapped in space and time, and I was now entering the afterlife, vast and free. And I was not alone. To my left a long line of people like me (and you) entering the full kingdom of God, a line so long it went beyond the eye could see. Likewise to my right, a line so numerous and so long as beyond comprehension. There we all were walking together side by side across open land into the fullness of the kingdom of God. I spied a long way down the line, amongst all these people, a face I recognised, but someone I would confess I did not like. "How did he get in here?" I found myself asking. And just at that moment he turned and caught sight of me and I recognised in his face that same question, as he looked at me - "How did he get in here?"

Each evening in this lock down there has been a compline, shared on our computers on Zoom, normally at 8 O'clock. If you have seen the invite feel free to come. If you have not yet received an invite but wish to come please e-mail me and we will sort it. A few days ago Alex chose Psalm 24 as the Psalm for the evening, it starts like this:

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters. Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart.

Let's ask the same question with different words: Who is allowed into The Kingdom of God? And the answer? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart. Not me, and not you unless..... the love of God is *so* great, so boundless, so relentless that it searches and finds and forgives and makes us clean and pure. It takes *all* our broken hearts and makes them whole, for that is the will of God.

The last sermon before our church and our world went into lock down highlighted the new world mantra calling us to wash our hands, to make sure that we had clean hands. The sermon reminded us that, whilst this message seemed new, the gospel message has *always* called us, in confession and prayer and worship, to have spiritually clean hands and a heart that is pure.

In tomorrow's podcast we will look at The prayer that seeks the kingdom of God, that desires the will of God and how this shows itself in God's desire to forgive us our sins. For tomorrow we look at The Lord's Prayer: Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.

