

At this time of year I go to several Proms. I book well in advance, working through the programme listings to choose what I want to go to. My taste in music is rather conventional, and sometimes I don't pick a particular concert because it's going to have some very modern music which I don't think I will like, even if the rest of the concert looks good. But sometimes I do – and I can be surprised by something new and unexpected. It's rooted in musical tradition – there are the usual instruments, an orchestra and a conductor – but the composer has made a completely original use of the 'tools' and produced a new interpretation which widens my understanding. I must admit that this doesn't always work. I've heard some excruciating stuff (though this may say more about me than the music), but when it does, it's wonderful.

This is rather like the experience that Matthew refers to in the last verse of today's gospel: 'every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.'

There is extra significance here for us at St Peter's. When a replacement was being considered for the original 'iron church' in 1889, three architects were invited to submit designs anonymously. Each design was identified by a motto. The one that won, which is essentially the building we are sitting in now, was entered as 'New and Old'. We shall celebrate its 125th anniversary next year.

But back to the gospel. Matthew talks about scribes 'trained for the kingdom of heaven'. But the scribes in the gospels were fundamentally hostile to Jesus. They were learned men who knew the Jewish scriptures inside out, and who taught and interpreted them, delivering judgements on what was and was not the Law. Those scribes were trained for the Temple. Matthew envisages training for the kingdom of heaven, which would produce Christian scribes. They were to be masters of a household (of Christian believers) who were familiar with the treasure (the scriptures and traditions – i.e. the 'old') but who taught and explained them in the light of the 'new': Jesus' incarnation, his teaching, his death and resurrection. That's as much of a challenge for today's preachers and evangelists as it was for first-century disciples.

What is the kingdom of heaven for which we are being trained? Jesus gives a series of analogies, using examples which, as with all his parables, would have been familiar to his audience. They knew about mustard seeds and yeast. They understood the practice of burying valuable items in the ground in times of danger – and if the original owner never came back and someone else found the treasure, the law allowed them to keep it, even if the field belonged to someone else. And they knew about rich men who loved and traded in beautiful things, and how something could be so perfect that it was worth selling all the rest of the stock in order to be able to buy it.

The kingdom starts small, like the yeast or the mustard seed, but in the right conditions it grows and flourishes until it affects and attracts everything around it, becoming a sanctuary. It's something that, when you find it, makes everything else look imperfect, tawdry, worthless. It gets such a hold on you that any sacrifice is worthwhile.

Every analogy breaks down if pushed too far, but there is more truth here. There can be lots of mustard seeds, lots of yeast, even lots of treasure hoards in different places. The kingdom of heaven can begin anywhere. It just needs someone to create the conditions in which an initiative can take off and grow. The kingdom of heaven isn't something to wait for. There may be evil going on, and if there is it will be found out in the end, like the bad fish in the net or the weeds in last week's field, but we can build a little corner of the kingdom here and now.

The group of worker priests I belong to think it's important to talk about our faith in language which makes sense to the people we work with every day. That means using everyday examples, just as Jesus did. Recently we met to talk about doing this. We said (*inter alia*):

The kingdom of heaven is like the person in Camden who started to visit and chat to a housebound neighbour, and then encouraged someone else to do the same. Now there is a befriending scheme across the borough which is a godsend to a friend who has MS.

The kingdom of heaven is like the manager who found that work had dried up and he and his team were likely to be made redundant. Instead of sitting around grumbling about how unfair it was, he pushed them to network with friends and colleagues, and to take the training courses they'd never quite had time for. He called in every favour and pulled every string he could reach to find roles they could apply for. When the HR manager came around three months later to check how many redundancy notices would be needed, she found that everyone already had another job – and most of them were better than the ones they'd had before.

If you look around, you'll see little pieces of kingdom work going on today. You can write, or tell, a modern parable. Better still – start some kingdom-building yourself, or join something that's already under way. Ask for God's help, pray for it to grow and flourish, and remember 'Old and New': traditional values with twenty-first century interpretations.