

## **Trinity 3 & Discipleship 4**

### **02/07/17 11:15 St Margaret's**

I don't know how much you have followed the events surrounding the fire in Kensington at Grenfell Tower. You can't really have missed it. The level of hurt and pain caused by the loss of so many people, has in some way been offset by the amazing stories of help and hospitality. We have watched thousands of people donate food, clothes, other possessions and money to people, many or all of whom they don't know. To the Christian, such acts of kindness should be seen as the values of the Kingdom of God. Where people go out of their way to help others, at cost to themselves. Perhaps some of us have seen that Spirit in previous generations, especially during war time.

In our sermon series this week we turn to the call to be disciples who live according to the values and standards of the one whom we follow, rather than the world in which we live. Christians are called to be members of the Kingdom of God. And Jesus helps us to understand what that means, not least in today's Gospel reading.

We heard in the Gospel Jesus speaking in what we know as the Sermon on the Mount. He tells the disciples to turn the other cheek, to forgo revenge, to give more than required in a lawsuit, to go the extra mile, to give to all who beg, lend without limit, love the enemy, pray for persecutors, and greet the stranger. In doing so, Jesus highlights the surprises that characterise life in God's realm. He challenges the disciples to do the opposite of what seems normal and reasonable.

In a world that is "all about me", Jesus offers an alternative we find difficult to imagine and embody. Today who can be perfect? It is easier to be mean, hold grudges, ignore those in need. If I give to everyone who begs, I will have nothing left for myself. If I turn the other cheek, I will get slapped again. If I love my enemies, I will be more persecuted or even killed. If I am too nice, I will be seen as weak, a pushover or a doormat.

We might not say all of these things out loud, but some of certainly do harbour these sentiments. Some of course are justified in feeling like this. Too many people know discrimination, because of their gender, sexuality, race, an illness or disability. Too many in our world suffer at the hands of oppressors. So Jesus words to forgive and be reconciled seem impossible, unrealistic or hollow.

But the payoff for acting against the prevailing tide of the world is to inherit the Kingdom of God. What do we get for loving, forgiving, being kind and gracious, and offering generously? It is of God himself. For God's community is filled with people who think of others first. Every decision and action carried out for the common good. Each person is sister or brother to the other and acts out of love. And the capacity to act like this is due to the empowering love of God, who is love. We are able to be gracious, forgiving, hospitable and generous because we are children of the God who showers us with abundant grace, mercy, love and protection. For it is when we dwell in God's love that we find the capacity to love. When we experience God's forgiveness, that we learn to forgive. When we know of God's generosity to us, that we too can be generous to others.

So in our discipleship, Jesus calls us not only to follow him, but to learn from him, and immerse ourselves in him. When we do so we learn the amazing capacity of the human being to do extraordinary acts of kindness, love and generosity. We have seen those at Grenfell Tower and elsewhere. This shows us that God is firmly at work building his Kingdom outside the Church as much as within it. Our calling as his followers, is to learn to see where God is at work, and to find ways to be part of him plan. May we too learn to find ways to be counter cultural to this world, in our love, forgiveness, generosity, and we grow in our discipleship of Jesus.