Isaiah 58.9b-14, Luke 13.10-17: Trinity 13

The Kingdom of God is all around us, and here now. It is concern for God and neighbour, according to the word of Isaiah. It is an unstoppable flow of healing grace in the story of the woman healed in the synagogue on a Sabbath. Today, it is this community gathered to receive bread and wine together, and so many other places and moments as well, wherever the vision of the Kingdom of God is glimpsed and treasured.

The Kingdom of God is there whenever people put others first, act generously and kindly. The Kingdom of God explodes into the moment whenever God’s love and grace triumph over the mundane agony and the daily pain people live with. The Kingdom of God is here and now as we gather in Christ’s name and likeness to be united in his praise and presence.

And none of this comes without price and without effort. The writer of Third-Isaiah is taking on huge interest groups and a whole way of living when he attempts to call the people returning to Israel out of exile from a way of keeping the Sabbath which is simple lip-service to a way of keeping the Sabbath which is devotion to God and service of others. It’s easy to imagine the complaints and comments which came back- You’re taking it too seriously, I need to do this deal today, God doesn’t mind if I do business on the way into the temple as long as I pop in…

The leader of the synagogue is horrified at what he sees, as Jesus heals the woman who has been ill for 18 years. It has happened right in front of him in his synagogue on the Sabbath. He doesn’t see what everyone else sees, God acting gloriously out of love. He sees his position in the community being compromised. He sees his entire role and existence as the interpreter of the law disappearing in front of him- who will need an intermediary now when God’s love is dancing and healing right there? So he desperately goes from person to person- to people who have always hung on his every word- looking for a flicker of agreement. But they feel a new hope and see a new world in the face of Jesus. The synagogue leader’s fearful legalism and stunted expectations are a pale and empty ghost in comparison.

The entire crowd rejoice, Luke writes, at what Jesus was doing. They know greatness and glory when it finds them. And the synagogue leader, perhaps, leaves them to it and goes home to kick his cat. And then sends an angry letter to Jerusalem, to the High Council, which will be in Jesus’ file on Maundy Thursday, part of the charges against him. Perhaps.

The Kingdom will be opposed, but these readings- and this morning- show how the Kingdom comes- a moment, a place, a world where we focus on God and the needs of others, where healing and presence are free and direct, where no thing and no rule comes between us and God, where, even if only for a moment, a heartbeat, God is wonderfully, tangibly present as his love acts and heals us.

It grows in our hearts and comes from our actions. But it also surprises us, whenever we see God at work, whenever we catch a glimpse of a relationship or a home or a life shining with love, shot through with grace. Or when we find ourselves doing something unthinkable because we suddenly know it’s the right thing to do. Or when we have a moment of absolute gift, when we can’t believe our luck, that someone calls us at just the right moment, that someone helps us when we’re at the end of our tether, when someone notices us when we feel lost.

I was going to say that each of these moments, every moment like that, is another brick in the Kingdom of God- but images of walls, while being ancient and helpful in many ways, don’t seem quite right today when we are focusing on God’s daring love for each of us, without limit, without stint. God doesn’t come to save some of us, some of the world. He comes to rescue all of the world, to reveal the goodness and Kingdom which lies just below the surface we can see, just below the rubbish we pile up to hide the beauty.

God breaks through the walls of polite behaviour, our attempts to limit and define him, and keeps on coming to us, even on the Sabbath, even to people in such familiar need that the community have stopped noticing them. Each moment of grace in which we glimpse-grasp something of the Kingdom of God is the removal of a layer of dust from the painting of God’s glorious creation, revealing something new of the world as it was made to be and as God is working to make it anew. And seeing it makes us want to be part of it, a red kite seizing the whole of our attention and causing our heart to soar.

This Kingdom is God’s love, compassion and care stretched out to all of us, breaking down every barrier. This Kingdom is the truth underlying creation, if only we looked below the appearance And it’s what we’re about, part of, becoming, here at Woosehill.

You haven’t actually come to Church this morning. You’ve come to glimpse and be part of the Kingdom of God. This time together, this place, this gathering of people of all ages and backgrounds, this is the Kingdom of God. We’re here to open ourselves to God’s love, to remember that God’s love is for each of us- and for everyone else as well. We are here to hear again the greatest love story in all of creation, of God’s love for his people, shown throughout history, made flesh in Jesus Christ, the embodied triumph of life over death, love over fear, light over darkness.

The Eucharist is both story and action. It tells us who we are and whose we are. It teaches us to recognise love in action and to be love in action, to point to the Kingdom of Love and to be it as well. Like the Sabbath in our first reading, the Eucharist is there to call us back to the community we should and can be. It is a tuning fork for our lives, helping us to discern what is good and godly and what is selfish and shallow and has no place here.

The Eucharist is all of this and so much more. What we take from the Eucharist is always unique and always the same. It is always unique because things settle in our hearts as God speaks to us and calls our attention to things we need to look at. It is a comfort when we are low and an inspiration, an invigoration, when we are well.

And it is always wonderfully the same- the offered outpouring of God’s love over and over again, through timeless words which are ever new: “This is my body, given for you. This is my blood, shed for you.” Each time, God’s Kingdom comes, his Kingdom of selflessness and daring love, his Kingdom made real in bread and wine and then made real in the world as walls are dismantled brick by brick and the beauty of the world is revealed inch by inch.

The Kingdom of God is here, as we gather. The Kingdom of God is here, laid out on the altar. And the Kingdom of God is here, ready, all around us, because of us, in our daily lives, waiting for us to discover it and to bring it to light.