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25th January 2026 – Third Sunday after Epiphany

Matthew 4.12-23

“Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand” v. 17

At the very core of Jesus' life giving message is, “repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

Dear old Google (now, not so young) tells me “the Kingdom of heaven/God occurs 122 times in the New Testament, so it's clearly a phrase we need to cherish! So, as it's so vital in understanding the life of a disciple – you, let me continue by asking a couple of questions. Do you believe that the Kingdom of heaven was begun by Jesus Christ; that people of goodwill are continuing to build it, and that ultimately God will ensure that this world will be completely transformed into the Kingdom of Heaven?

When Jesus speaks about the Kingdom of heaven, he is proclaiming, ‘God is the living God’ who acts in this world. That's why Jesus' miracles are so important. Jesus also states through his life and words that, “God really is God”, which means he alone holds the threads of the world in his hands, and therefore nobody, but nobody else does.

Now you might say, “well hasn't God always sustained the world?” And, the answer to your question must be, “Yes”. So, Jesus is saying, “God is going beyond anything seen or expressed before, and it's happening now through my life”. Perhaps the question we now need to ask, and think about is, “Can I see it, do I live in it, and in what way am I helping to build God's kingdom? I hope these questions are helpful.

But, let's not forget the beginning of this majestic verse, which as you know is repent – “Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand”. The word repent or repentance is also a much used word in the Old and New Testament.

Why is this word – repent, so important in helping to create the Kingdom of heaven? Can't we just build places which are secure, peaceful prosperous and full of love without the need to repent?

You might recall Jesus comparing the Pharisee with the tax collector? The rather smug Pharisee likes going to the Temple to worship God; to say lots of words, sing, pray and be with all his religious chums. He's a happy bunny! While the tax collector knows he's ruining his life and other people's lives, and he also crucially knows, he needs to change. Furthermore, he knows that change requires God's help. In contrast our rather brash and self-assured Pharisee neither seeks God or needs God, because he thinks he's got God in his pocket. While the tax collector, who is so aware of his misshaped life longs for God to heal him and help him to find a way forward in truth and love. Or put it this way, the tax collector repents because in his heart he realises that he needs to be saved, and deep down he knows that it is God who is the only one who creates a new world, or that ultimately, everything good stems from God.

Stephen

Sunday Morning Worship in Christ Well, and on Zoom at 10.30 am will be led by Rev Simon Walkling.

Cycle of Prayer in the Region – we will pray for Tabernacle, Mumbles

A Prayer of Approach

(Lectionary Readings: Isaiah 9.1-4: Psalm 27.1, 4-9: 1 Corinthians 1.10-18: Matthew 4.12-23)

O God, you have gathered us here,
and we have come to follow your call.

We gladly fall into the arms of your love
as you offer us mercy, acceptance and welcome.

We set down, for this time,
the nets we mend each day,
the work we do in this world,
and the responsibilities we hold.

For your call to us is clear, catching our breath,
disturbing our lives, and opening new paths.

Let this be a time
when we are made new,
and we find again
the vocation you have given each one.

And, though we are not the saints we imagine you want, give us,
we pray, your Spirit to heal, mend and restore us,
that we may catch your good news
and share it with a hungry world.

Susan Durber *(URC Prayer Handbook 2026)*

