

Each year in the Burrow School there is a start of year service here in the Church which is lead by the new 6<sup>th</sup> Class. What has amazed me over the years that I have been here is that each 6<sup>th</sup> class brings something fresh to this service. The service last Friday was no exception. Over the course of the service they were exploring the whole idea of positivity, the importance of having a positive approach to life, to situations.

Of course there is more to positivity than a mindless optimism, of saying ‘Sure, isn’t everything grand?’ as the world collapses about you. It is the attitude of mind we bring to life as it is, our problems, our opportunities, our circumstances that works itself out in our actions, in our behaviours, in the priorities we set.

Our Old Testament lesson this morning is an example of what I am thinking about. The setting is Jerusalem under siege. Any one with property were doing their best to sell up, to get what they can before the Babylonians take over. Jeremiah was under arrest. He had been uncompromising in his denunciation of the society of his day. They had turned their back on the God who had redeemed his people not only in worship but in the way they ran their life. The calamity that was about to befall them was the outcome of their failure and their unfaithfulness. And here we find him buying land, meticulously going through the whole process of drawing up deeds, signing them, having them witnessed and stored in a secure place. Then once the whole process is complete he declares:

<sup>14</sup>Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. <sup>15</sup>For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land. *Jer 32:14-15*

At one level, this could be dismissed as the mindless optimism that passes for positivity that I was talking about. What Jeremiah is declaring is that God's ultimate purposes for Jerusalem, for the people of Judah are peace and prosperity for the land.

This talk of God's intention of peace and prosperity for Jerusalem, for the Kingdom of Judah, for the people was not just spoken of in the abstract; it was being declared in the life and actions of Jeremiah. God works in and through people, even the most unlikely of people at times. He worked through the likes of Jeremiah, through Moses, through Paul. Jesus called twelve very unlikely individuals to be his disciples, to continue his work in the world. These were very human individuals who sometimes got things very wrong. I often find myself reflecting on the closing words of Matthew's Gospel:

<sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." *Matt 28:17-20*

Some doubted, some still did not understand but the commission to go and make disciples is given to them all. God works not so much through our perfection as our faithfulness. With this in mind, I just want to pursue this idea of words expressing faith carrying on through into action. For our Psalm today, I am using a response that is drawn from the Taize community:

The Kingdom of God is justice and peace  
and joy in the Holy Spirit.  
Come Lord and open is us the gates of your Kingdom

How is God's Kingdom of justice, of peace, of joy to be recognised in the world of today? It begins with people. The campaigns against slavery, against

child labour in Victorian Britain, against apartheid, for civil rights in the United States began with people. Many, such as Wilberforce, Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther King did so out of deep Christian conviction. At times they were lone voices, their motives were questioned and many sought to discredit them but they remained faithful and ultimately prevailed.

But before Isaiah, Jeremiah, before the modern prophets of our time, Wilberforce, Tutu or King could take their stand, something had to happen in their own hearts and lives, the Kingdom had to break into their lives.

The Kingdom of God is justice and peace  
and joy in the Holy Spirit.  
Come Lord and open is us the gates of your Kingdom.

In the Lord's Prayer we are taught to pray, 'Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.' Your Kingdom come. As with so many of our prayers, we have to be part of the answer. If God's will is to be done, if the values of the Kingdom are to be advanced, it has to begin in the lives of ordinary people. But we may say, 'What can I do? What difference can I make?'

This is where the positivity of 6<sup>th</sup> Class comes to bear on my thoughts. If compassion, reconciliation, truth, justice, integrity are to be marks of the society in which we live, then they must be present in us as individuals and as a community.

May God enable us to be living and effective signs of his presence in the world in which we live, in our homes, our schools, our places of work and recreation. May God open is us the gates of his Kingdom.