

## The Touch of God.

Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021. The Welland-Fosse Benefice Service.

***“You are not far from the Kingdom of God”*** (Mark 12.34).

### **The Sistine Chapel**

The central panel of Michaelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling depicts the Creation of Adam: God leaning down and touching the finger of the listless Adam – a touch which symbolically gives life to the empty human shell and empowers creation with The Spirit of God. It is an example of The Kingdom of God breaking into humanity and thus society. We see God bestowing the authority of his reign on humankind, an action for which we pray regularly, daily: *“Thy Kingdom Come, thy will be Done”*. It is a prayer which I have used fervently or passively almost every day of my mature life. Oh, for that touch of God which brings everything so much more alive! So where is The Kingdom?

### **The Kingdom of God.**

Throughout my ministry I have been fascinated, tantalized by this concept of The Kingdom breaking into our lives and God’s writ running through the world. It is the reign which Christ ushered in to restore the broken world due to the disobedience of Adam. It was central to his teaching and found practical expression in his miracles. It is the kind of society for which we crave and have tried to reproduce in all manner of political and ideological structures. In theory, some political systems come closer to that blueprint but in practice we know that they all fail to deliver social justice, let alone do justice to God.

I attended a monastic theological college. In that ordered world, focussed on worship and godly education as well as shared domestic work I found perhaps the closest expression of The Kingdom that I have ever known. It was this framework which strove to do justice to both commandments: loving God and loving one's neighbour. I felt myself to be *‘not far from the Kingdom of God’* but as we know from lurid recent headlines, religious communities can also miss the mark.

In this passage of scripture we have just heard, we find Jesus debating with the scribes about the greatest commandment. He goes beyond the question and takes two commandments and sews them together: ‘Love God and love your neighbour as yourself’. But he knew, as we know and the Home Secretary certainly knows, it is impossible to moderate human behaviour with law unless there is an inward conversion of the heart. Jesus put these two commandments together precisely to address the priest and the Levite who left the wounded traveller by the roadside in order to get on with the temple ritual. We live by grace, not by law.

## **The Kingdom Today.**

I remember watching the 1972 TV series on Colditz. It was the introduction which fascinated me in its closeness to my search for the Kingdom. The view of the castle changed: it grew, then faded; it was full then splintered before our eyes. So it is with The Kingdom. Jesus ushered in the kingdom and said it was within us, close to us. This scribe in our reading today was told he was not far from the Kingdom of God.

And in these beautiful surroundings of The Welland-Fosse Benefice, surely the touch of God can be found! And so it has proved to be and some of you will have certainly experienced it. I have found it in the busy executive embracing yet another critical task to announce the kingdom; the dying woman still passionate to be right with God; the student, glowing with calf-love; the agnostic, wrestling with unbelief he can't believe. Then there is the artist, given up on religion yet fascinated by God's touch in nature; the widow, wrestling with 'the dying of the light'; the new parents, bowled over by the generosity of God.

The picture clears then fades. The touch of God is difficult to predict but it is always present, surprising us as a bird-watcher in his concentration upon an open sky is suddenly rewarded by the flash of the king-fisher.

"The King Fisher": Eliot's phrase for the work of God in Christ. That is the purpose of The Touch of God, to draw us all closer to Him and closer to one another.

So as we symbolically draw round God's altar in a few moments time we will find those elements of God's Kingdom enlivened by his touch. We gather as equals, drawn by Christ's giving of himself. We are fed, each to his or her own capacity with the gifts of God changed by his passion. Nothing is wasted; nothing left over. All is suffused by gratitude. Thanks be to God. Amen.