Some of us were up with the larks on Thursday morning (including a few of us who identify more with the owls and don’t normally do early mornings and who promptly went back to bed afterwards!) We gathered at St Luke’s at 6am to mark the ascension of our Lord and to pray and wait on God.

This was the start of the 9 or 10 day season of prayer between Ascension and Pentecost which is an ancient tradition based on the disciples waiting and praying in Jerusalem as instructed by Jesus. This little known tradition has been revived by ABJWelby in recent years and is a growing movement of prayer, that has spread across the denominations and the nations. It’s a period when we are encouraged to pray more intentionally each day ‘thy kingdom come’.

What do we mean when we pray these words?

First of all what is God’s kingdom – Jesus said to Pilate, when asked if he was a king ‘my kingdom is not of this world’. So Go’s Kingdom is not physical place, not a geographical area with borders or boundary walls, but anywhere where Jesus is acknowledged as sovereign, where his will and ways are obeyed, where his values of justice, truth and love are upheld.

As disciples of Jesus we are part of God’s kingdom for he rules in our hearts, we submit to him as Lord and seek to follow his ways and his will.

In gospel reading today Jesus prays for his disciples because they are not of this world as he is not of this world.

Two interpretations of ‘world’ in scripture – firstly, the world is the earth and all that is in it. This is the world that God created, that he loves jn 3:16, the world that he redeems.

In contrast World, perhaps one could differentiate it by a capital W, is also used to represent organised systems of beliefs, values and knowledge that are in active rebellion and hostility against God. Sometimes the phrase ‘this present age’ is also translated world in the bible, when it’s speaking of the prevailing culture of the world.

The Bible tells us that the world is under authority of Satan. He is called prince of this world and he prowls about seeking to destroy and disrupt the good works of God and his people. It is Satan who has instigated and fashioned the World (capital W).

Paul in his classic passage about spiritual warfare describes how our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers and principalities, the powers and spiritual forces of this dark world – Satan’s rules and values are opposed to God. Selfishness, material greed, lust and pride of life, all of which are so tempting to our human hearts are the ways and values of this opposing principality.

God’s kingdom is, in contrast, as light is to darkness

And so we pray especially at this time for God’s kingdom, his rule of justice, peace, mercy, truth, love, joy etc to *come*….to break into this world, to spread through and impact society, to change the atmosphere, to influence culture.

We are called to pray TKC in the world - For nations, for governments, for councils, for business, for education, for media, for public services.

Let’s a take a moment of quiet to pray for that world saying Thy Kingdom Come! (silence)….Lord in your mercy….

We are also to pray ‘Thy Kingdom Come’ in our own lives.

Jesus’ prayer recorded in John’s gospel that we heard today declares that his followers, his subjects, are *in* the world but not *of* the world – familiar expression but what does it mean.

To be ‘*of* the world’ means to adopt its values, to live by its standards and pursue its rewards more than we seek God. Scripture has loads of warnings against ‘loving the world’ - in Matt 6:24 Jesus speaking about love of money says can’t serve two masters; and later in same gospel says what does it profit a person to gain the whole world but lose soul. John in his letter says if you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you; and James in his letter is equally strong in his warning ‘friendship with the world = enmity with God;

Some Christians might interpret this to mean we should withdraw from the world, separate selves, as some strict sects do, but Jesus prayer to his father clearly asks that he *not* take them out of the world but rather keep them from the evil one. Reflecting another line of the prayer he taught his disciples to use ‘Deliver us from evil.’

Jesus expects us to remain in the world, but in remaining, we are to be on our guard from the World (capital W), seeking spiritual protection.

Peter’s first letter to the churches warns them to “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil **prowls** around like a roaring **lion** looking for someone to devour.”

And Paul to Corinthians states that Satan masquerades as angel of light - he makes what is wrong seem right, luring the unsuspecting. Hence Jesus prayer to the Father to protect his followers from the evil one. This is not about withdrawal but resistance, not conforming, but remaining distinctive, demonstrating an alternative countercultural way, God’s way. Romans 12:2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

So, we, as subjects of King Jesus, are to be *in* the world but not *of* the world. And the second strand of our prayer TKC is to pray for ourselves, to pray that God’s Kingdom will take more ground & be established in our hearts; that we would more and more grow to be good subjects of King Jesus; that we would have the strength and courage to resist Satan and his wily ways;

so we don’t conform to the ways of the world but are continually transformed into Christ’s likeness, by his Spirit, hence the accompanying prayer of this season leading up to Pentecost ‘Come Holy Spirit’.

Let’s take a moment of stillness to pray that for ourselves saying ‘Thy Kingdom come in our hearts….Come Holy Spirit’ …(silence)…..Lord in your mercy….hear our prayer.

Having prayed for the world and for ourselves we may discover that we are also called to be an answer to that prayer ourselves.

‘In’ is a passive word but Jesus declares in this prayer how he has sent us *into* the world, very much an active word. As the Father has sent Jesus so he sends us, with a mission. In Mark’s gospel we read Jesus’ instructions to his disciples to ‘go into the world and preach the gospel to all creation’.

We are called to love the world…hang on a minute…didn’t I just say we’re warned NOT to love the world? Did you spot that! To love the world – to not love the world! Both are scriptural and both are true. One of those wonderful paradoxes of Christian faith that need to be held in tension.

This is where that small w/capital W may help give understanding. No, we mustn’t love the World (capital W) with its self centred culture and unjust systems, but we are to love the world (small w) as Jesus loves it. Do you remember, he mixed with the tax collectors and sinners, he touched the leprous and bleeding, he had compassion on prostitutes and adulterers. But he didn’t hold back from speaking out against the hypocrites, the self-righteous, the unmerciful, and the unjust. He loved the world (with small w) ultimately dying for it but hated the World (capital W) and its ways.

Like him we are called to love the world, its people, community & the environment, whilst resisting its ungodly pressures. We’re called to proactively go into the world, be salt and light, to be ambassadors of God’s kingdom, if you like – this is an outworking of being a disciple 24/7.

I’ve spoken before of the LICC teaching in Flourish 6 m’s which include mould culture, mouthpiece truth and justice, minister grace and love, model godly character, messenger of the gospel.

We are called to make a difference, to be blessing, to bring God’s Kingdom into the world.

As pray TKC for the world and for ourselves and in obedience go into world, we actually find that God is there before us. This World with a capital W is not all embracing, not all encompassing, not all powerful. As Psalmist says ‘darkness is not dark to you’. There is no place where God is not.

This mission that he calls us to, sending us into the world, is his mission. He is already at work, already revealing his truth and justice, already stirring people’s hearts. He calls us to look for him, to listen for him, to join in with him, to witness to him, to proclaim his Kingdom to the world, the world he loves, to those whom he would gather into his kingdom.

And so the third focus of this prayer is to pray TKC in the hearts of people we know and love who don’t yet know Jesus. A prayer that their minds would be opened to the truth of the Gospel; that they may know and experience the love God has for them and that they would turn to Jesus in humble submission and acknowledge him as Lord as Lord and saviour and King.

This year, Archbishop Justin Welby is recommending that we each think of upto 5 people whom we long to come to know Jesus and to pray TKC daily for them. Not too late, though started last Thursday.

Let’s take a moment to ask God to reveal to us those he wants us to pray for and then to pray Thy Kingdom Come in the hearts of these people (silence)……Lord in your mercy…hear our prayer.

Over this next week as we prepare to celebrate Pentecost, let’s daily pray Thy Kingdom Come, for the world, for ourselves and for upto 5 people to come to know Jesus.

And we can pray these simple words with confidence (those familiar liturgical words) because this is Jesus prayer, this is God’s will, *and the inevitability of its growth is like a mustard seed that grows to a huge tree and like a light that dispels the darkness and….but those metaphors could lead me into a whole other sermon, or sermon series so I better stop now with prayer!*

*Thy Kingdom Come in the world/ our hearts/the hearts of those we love….*

Come Holy Spirit. Amen