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## *And finally ... The Kingdom of God is like this ...*

**T**HE vivid language of the Bible is rich in word pictures, charting the ways people have found God, and how God has found them. Prophets, poets and storytellers described God using terms from their experience: rock, fortress, strong tower, the father of disobedient children, the husband of an unfaithful wife, a shepherd, a mother of a young child.

Jesus too, used illustrations from everyday experience to describe how God feels about us, and what God's kingdom is like.

Some of these biblical images still mean something to us, some have ceased to be meaningful; for what use is a strong tower these days? With a leap of imagination, we can guess that it's an image of security, but if we want to say that our relationship with God makes us feel safe, we would probably put it another way.

For Jesus, the evidence of God at work, and his kingdom arriving was all around; in nature, in the home, on the farm, anywhere. It occurred to me that we should be able to see the Kingdom of God breaking in around us, and therefore, new metaphors and images should be possible. Who better to test the theory than an average Sunday evening church congregation?

On several occasions, I have led services that explored images from modern experience, and each congregation has produced some very different insights.

As an introduction, we discuss the way the Bible expresses teaching and experience of God in colourful poetry and metaphors and we read some of the images of the Kingdom of God found in the gospels. The interesting part happens when I give out paper and pens, and what seems like an exercise in creative writing.

Under the heading, 'The Kingdom of God is like ...', people can select an item from a list; these might include an island, a house, a piece of furniture, something electrical, or something from your line of work. They are then invited to spend a few minutes expanding on their own cameo of the Kingdom.

The images of Jesus came from everyday things. Different, even contradictory lessons can be drawn from them; the Kingdom is like treasure we have to discover by hard work, and also like a fishing net that comes trawling for us. It's like a mustard seed that grows very publicly out of control; but also like yeast that grows mysteriously and invisibly.

This has been reflected in some of the modern images put forward; a midwife shared her image of the kitchen table as a place of nurturing a growing family. It was where bodies were fed, homework done, and confidences told and heard. A secretary spoke of a more individual struggle – her frustration with her new computer. She knew she had to keep reading the manual, and that it would take a great deal of exploration and commitment to learning to get the best from the machine.

Other images came from work. A baker, with all his up-to-date knowledge of how yeast works, expanded on the image of the yeast as a fitting way to describe the growth of the kingdom in his own life. A music teacher shared the enormous amount of work in coaching children to work together, but her pride in a final, harmonious performance.

A pharmacist brought a homely image; the cupboard in his house which was the central repository for family treasures such as photo albums and mementos. It was also where wrapping paper was kept. His cupboard reminded him that the kingdom is precious, and a gift.

Images from nature were popular; a student spoke of her sense of awe when canoeing on a lake at night, revelling in the tranquillity and trusting her guide to lead her through the darkness. A teacher talked about her garden, where hard work had led to a place of beauty and tranquillity, a treat for eyes and nose, and a haven for birds and insects.

The end result, in different churches, has been a quiet, reflective time, in the context of worship, where people have had space to consider and voice their own experience, hear each other, and in hearing, hear God. Which is probably an image of the kingdom in itself.

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