

## REFLECTION 8 OCTOBER 2017

Just a few words. We began this service hearing the lectionary reading today from Exodus – the 10 commandments, followed by Jesus' new commandment to love one another as God loves us. This is the framework on which the Kingdom of God is built, or the Kingdom of Heaven as Matthew more frequently refers to it. All of his ministry displays the work of building up the world as God would have it be: all the healings, the teachings, his passion for caring for the outcast, the so-called sinners and the oppressed, the challenges to unjust practices and the misused power of the religious authorities. We have also heard about the work of caring for people around us today, our neighbours in fact; people who are trying to escape violence and abuse, people who have nowhere to go and do not know who to turn to, until they do find help from the likes of Izy and Patricia through the Lindara programme.

This is the work of building the kingdom today, of living the gospel. It is prophetic action in a world that sometimes struggles to know what to do when we are surrounded by so much that seems to ignore the cries of the needy, either close at hand or far away but seen on our TV and computer screens. So much need can be disempowering. There seems to be such obvious evil, as in Las Vegas and the whole issue of gun possession. What is empowering is hearing more of what is happening – and many good things are happening that we rarely hear about. I know that many people here and in the churches around us put an enormous effort into the markets which help fund the Lindara programme. We keep doing it because we know it is so important. And we are thinking of ways in which we can encourage more community involvement.

Maybe we can see this as working in the vineyard so that life will be fruitful. The parable we heard about the landowner planting the vineyard and sending his slaves to collect the harvest, only for them to be killed, then sending his son who is also killed, seems pretty clear in pointing to the Pharisees, the chief priests and elders who are on a collision course with Jesus. The tension is building. It is easy to see this as directed to the religious authorities. But we should also ask ourselves how easily do we think that we are safely in possession of God's kingdom, that we are guardians of the Kingdom's ways. Does this blind us to those on the outside, who are not part of us and do not "belong"? If we believe that God is still at work in the vineyard, that Jesus is present everywhere as well as in what we do, then we must always look around us and see how we may be part of the work of tending the growth and the fruiting of what is around us. We are part of a very big kingdom, one whose boundaries we can't see – though churches often try to set them. We are part of the kingdom's work, and we thank God for the prophetic words and actions that remind us of the ministry that is happening now, that recalls for us the ministry of Jesus back then. We give thanks that we can all be part of this, in whatever small way is possible. It is our calling as followers of Christ, it is not an optional extra, because it is what changes the world.