

June 2, 2019
Seventh Sunday of Easter

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GREAT ENDS OF THE CHURCH VI – KEYS TO THE KINGDOM

The exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world

Matthew 16:13-20

(Mat 16:13 NRSV) Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (Mat 16:14 NRSV) And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." (Mat 16:15 NRSV) He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" (Mat 16:16 NRSV) Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." (Mat 16:17 NRSV) And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. (Mat 16:18 NRSV) And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. (Mat 16:19 NRSV) I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Mat 16:20 NRSV) Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Prayer for illumination

O Great Spirit, move among us, within us, and around us if necessary, that your Kingdom might come and your will be done, according to your living Word this day. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

The kingdom of God is the core and kernel of the Christian faith. It is the heart and soul of the Gospel. Jesus talked about it continuously, mentioning it over 100 times. It is the central idea which gives coherence and meaning to all his other ideas. It is the golden thread woven in and out of most of his metaphors and parables. It begins and ends in the prayer our Lord taught us to pray, you know the words... "Thy kingdom come," and "for thine is the kingdom..."

There is no definitive description of what the kingdom is. One thing we do know, not once is the kingdom of God like any kingdom of earth. Jesus gave us hints and clues about it; he made analogies, drew mental pictures. Jesus told stories to illuminate aspects ...

["The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field (Matthew 13:44) "...the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls..." (Matthew 13:45. "...the kingdom of heaven is like a net which was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind..." (Matthew 14:47. "...the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old... No clear working definition of the kingdom is offered by Jesus nor any complex theological definition in esoteric terms for the scholars.]

The truth of it is that when Jesus would say "kingdom of God," he was making a very political statement. He was challenging the earthly authorities and proclaiming a heavenly authority, a new world order, a different system, He literally meant a whole new way of being and relating to one another.

It isn't so much that God and the Kingdom are mysterious, it's that God and the Kingdom are dynamic. Both are vigorous confrontations to humanity ... vast and of great value... ever becoming, ever happening, ever present, but still so much more – inexpressible, inexhaustible, indefinite, beyond dimension and description.

H.G. Wells called it the most astonishing proposition ever presented to the mind of humanity – the Kingdom of God. [The Kingdom of God is founded on a higher order: redemption, love, mutual aid, justice, and a fair opportunity for everyone. It is a life of sharing, not selfishness; a life of renunciation, not acquisition.]

"Thy kingdom come, . . ." Just when will it come? What will be the signs of its impending arrival? What are the keys to recognizing it and to opening its gates that we might enter?

I want first to stress that we do not "create" the Kingdom of God in any causative sense. The kingdom is God's gift. Jesus told a gathering, " it is the Father's pleasure to give you the kingdom." Luke 12:32-34 In another he said: "... the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." and so the keys to the kingdom open us to the experience of what God, from the storehouse of divine grace, gives to us and wills for us to be citizens of and participants in. Therefore, the exhibition of the kingdom of God is something for all believers to embody, express exhibit, and give indication of in all we do...

Exhibiting the Kingdom means that the Christian can never be at ease in a world that is hell-bent on self-destruction. The kingdom of God is not some far off dream but the activity of God right now and in our midst this moment seeking to transform us all.

Sometimes churches, in an effort to be warm and inviting, expect too little of people. We have a gospel to proclaim. We have a Lord and Savior to whom we belong. We have a merciful God to worship. We have a way (God's way) to live in the world. We have a God-given mandate to care for the spiritual life of ourselves and nurture in others. We have a calling to seek justice in the public square, and to stand up for Truth in a world that accepts the truth only when convenient. But can we expect anyone to pay any attention to us unless we ourselves, in all our speaking and acting, exhibit our gratitude for the overwhelming mercy and love of God.

If we wish to participate in the coming of God's reign, if we care at all that our lives in Christ mean something, the exhibition of the Kingdom revealed through Jesus Christ is our response. Christ has given us indicators, such as: that it's better to create than consume; that it's better to reconcile than divide; that it's better to serve than dominate; better to forgive than avenge; better to be prayerful than anxious; better to be humble than proud; better to love than hate. We are called to openly and actively enlist with the abused, stand with the

hopeless, offer a warm cloth to the head of the afflicted; to stand for justice in the councils of community and state and strive for civility in our places of endeavor, among our families and within our churches.

A teacher once asked his young students some questions. Pointing to a stone in his ring, a flower on the table, and a bird that flew past the window, he asked to what kingdom each of them belonged. The children gave him the right answers: the mineral, the vegetable, and the animal kingdom.

Then he asked, "to do what kingdom to do I belong?" "This is a key question for our lives. We can belong to God's Kingdom, we can experience it; We can exhibit it now, today, because God has put it in our midst. The keys are in our hands.

Dr. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, made popular the term "kin-dom" as an alternative to kingdom, as in, "we are all kin to one another." We might begin to see every person we encounter as a child of God, worthy of a place at the table.

I believe the kingdom is exhibited through small acts, through unheralded deeds, through random acts of kindness, through intentional intimations of God's love.

I have seen the kingdom exhibited in, by and through this community of faith...

In the sacrificial gifts...

In the sound of little feet upon these chancel steps

In the loving concern expressed when illness invades the family circle.

In the nurture of children and the willingness to meet them where they are.

In the sensitive care extended at the times grief.

In the laughter lifted in our collective worshipful work.

In the diligence extended in offering unto God our very best.

In the efforts to build up the body of Christ even in places where people and dialects are different, but the same lord is worshiped.

In the tender loving care given to maintain enhance the buildings and grounds of our church campus.

In hospitality extended – to make this faith community warm, receptive, welcoming and inclusive.

I've seen the kingdom of God exhibited. I've seen it with my very eyes. And you, Kin of mine in Jesus Christ are KEY.

Amen

Closing Prayer

Remind us of the commitment we make when we pray "Thy kingdom come." Challenge us to open our lives to the power of your Spirit so that the work of the kingdom that we OUGHT to do we WILL do. For we pray it in the name of Jesus.