

Is

Luke 17:20-21

June 15, 2008

The kingdom of God is like this ... Once there was a king who decided to check on his servants' accounts. They brought to him a servant who owed him millions of dollars. The king ordered the servant and his family into slavery until the full amount should be reimbursed, but the servant pleaded with him, "Be patient with me and I will pay you back!" The king felt sorry for him and so he forgave the debt.

The kingdom of God is like this ... Once there was a man who went out early in the morning to hire some men to work in his vineyard. He found some laborers and set them to work, promising to pay them a fair wage. At nine o'clock and at noon and at again at three o'clock in the afternoon he went out to the marketplace and hired more workers to work in his vineyard, telling them he would pay them a fair wage. He went once more to the marketplace at five o'clock, one hour before quitting time and found some workers doing nothing. He hired them too and they worked the remainder of the day in his vineyard. When the time came for the workers to be paid, the workers who were hired last were at the head of the line and they were each paid a full day's wage. The laborers who had worked all day got very excited, but when their turn came, they too were paid a full day's wage. When they complained, the landowner said, "Don't I have a right to do what I want with my own money? Why are you upset because I choose to be generous?"

The kingdom of God is like this ... Once there was a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son. The feast was prepared and the invitations sent, but none of the invited guests came to the feast. The king sent out his servants to bring in whomever they could find off the streets and the wedding hall was filled with people of all sorts. But the king found one guest who was not wearing wedding clothes, so he had him thrown back out onto the street.

The kingdom of God is like this ... A man takes a mustard seed and sows it in his field. It is the smallest of seeds, but it grows into the largest of plants, and the birds come and make their nests in its branches.

The kingdom of God is like this ... A man happens to find a treasure hidden in a field and is so excited that he sells everything else he has and buys that field.

This is what the kingdom of God is like: something precious, something powerful, something mysterious, something inviting, something demanding, something ... different. The kingdom of God is not like our kingdoms. It is the world as will be with God in charge. It is a world at peace; a world where all have enough; a world where none are left out or fall by the wayside, where none are rejected or oppressed; a world whose natural riches are enjoyed and appreciated, not exploited or despoiled; a world where love is the rule and the practice and the reward. It is the substance of our hopes, the world we've been waiting for!

So the natural question is ... when? When will it happen? When will it come? When will our waiting be over? When will God make things right? When will the swords be beaten into plowshares? When will the oppressed be set free? When will God come to put down the proud and lift up the humble? When will God come to bring good news to the poor? When will the kingdom of God come?

That's what the Pharisees wanted to know. That's what they asked Jesus. When? When will the kingdom of God come?

And Jesus answered them like he usually answers such questions, not with a direct answer, but with a change of direction, something to make them think. "Hold on now! The kingdom of God does not come in such a way as to be seen. You can't point to it and say 'Here it is' or 'There it is' ... because the kingdom of God is within you."

Maybe! Maybe that's what Jesus said!

There is some dispute about how the word "entos" in Jesus' answer should be translated. Did he say: "The kingdom of God is within you" or "The kingdom of God is among you"?

Do be careful if you decide that Jesus said "within you" because it is easy to make Jesus come off sounding like some new age guru!

*The answers to all your questions lie within your own heart ...*

*You can journey the world over only to come home and find that what you are seeking has been there all along ...*

*Let go of the world. Your highest adventure lies within, in the exploration of the depths of your own soul ...*

OK ... Does that sound like Jesus to you? All about personal development, personal fulfillment, self-realization?

Jesus' understanding of the kingdom of God is about as far as you can get from that kind of narcissistic self-preoccupation! The kingdom Jesus talks about is about relationships, about human interaction, about changed lives and a changed world. It is not something only "in here," but something "out there", a world remade, a world made new, as God intends it.

That's why "among you" makes best sense to me. The kingdom is among you, at work among you, in the ways you are working together, living together, building a new world together.

But really, it doesn't matter. "The kingdom of God is within you," "The kingdom of God is among you" -- it doesn't much matter which way we say it, because the important word is the word that comes before ... "is." The kingdom of God is. The kingdom of God is! The world that you've longed for, the world that you've waited for, is!

The kingdom of God is ... We don't need to ask when. We simply need to enjoy it, embrace it, live in it, live by it.

Don't wait for peace to come. Live it!

Don't wait for a just world. Make it!

Don't lament a world where some don't have enough. Give them enough! That is the kingdom!

Don't imagine a world where love is the answer. Just love! Love God and love this world and love the people in it! Can you do that? That is the kingdom of God. When you do that, the kingdom of God is!

I used to feel like I was always waiting for my life to start. One day, when I really start living, when I am doing what I want to do, what I was meant to do ...

Have you ever felt that way? Have you been waiting for the day when you find a job that is meaningful and fulfilling ... when you have enough time, when you have fewer demands, when your children are out of the house ... when you grow up, when you know what you want, when you are clearer about what God wants you to do ... when you're ready?

You are ready! That day is here! The kingdom of God is!