



The Reign of God

“The time is fulfilled,” he said. “The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the Good News!” Mk1:15

“The Kingdom of God is like this...” Thus said Jesus so many times in introducing his parables.

The Kingdom of God, God’s Reign in the world, is Jesus’ central and urgent message – mentioned 160 times in the Christian Scriptures. It is the treasure in the field, the pearl of great value, the net which fills to breaking point, the small seed which grows into a great tree and offers shelter to the creatures of the earth.

In announcing his ministry, Jesus proclaimed that a new age has come and the reign of God is near – begun but not yet complete! The images he uses of the Kingdom are images of abundance and inestimable value; the Kingdom is a reality which may have small beginnings but will grow and will act like the leaven in bread to make it rise; it is that which is worth leaving all behind to seek. The Kingdom is its own reward. All believers have a role to play in bringing about this reality which is the Kingdom.

God loves us not because of what we are, but we are because God loves us. In our 21st century culture of individualism, some tend to think that human endeavour alone can achieve a full life and bring us happiness. Unfortunately, it is this attitude which impedes the great promise of the Reign of God from becoming more of a reality. Human sinfulness stops us from recognizing our need for God’s overwhelming love and generosity. The effects of human sinfulness are all around us: violence, poverty, broken relationships, our damaged Earth. The values espoused by the modern world are the values of pride, power and prestige.

However Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom speaks of a reversal of the values which many would consider worthwhile. The reign of God is counter-cultural to the empire building of nations. It is the **poor in spirit, the meek, the peacemakers, those who mourn, those who hunger and thirst for justice and are persecuted for it** who will inherit the Kingdom of God. The great reversal of God’s reign, God’s dream, comes as a shock!

The Kingdom is offered to us as a gift. Our role is respond to this overwhelming generosity of God and help make present God’s reign wherever we find ourselves.

Like Jesus, we are invited to seek out space to pray, to resist the seduction of power and material gain and then work actively and with conviction for peace, for justice, for Earth and for a healing of all the brokenness of our world. The seeds of the Reign of God have been planted; they are all around us in the actions and attitudes of ordinary people, but have yet to grow to fullness.

The aching heart of today’s world needs to hear this Good News. God awaits our response.

“Where is the dwelling of God?”

This was the question with which the Rabbi of Kotzk surprised a number of learned men who happened to be visiting him. They laughed at him:

“What a thing to ask!

Is not the whole world full of his glory?”

Then he answered his own question:

“God dwells wherever people let him in.”

Martin Buber

PARABLE REFLECTION

The Workers in the Vineyard Mt 20:1-16

‘For the Kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard... thus the last shall be first and the first shall be last.’

The great reversal which is a characteristic of the Kingdom of God is the centre piece of this parable. The landowner hires labourers to work in his vineyard for an agreed wage: some at dawn, some at nine, others at noon and still more even later in the day. Yet all are paid the same wage. No injustice has been done to those who worked longest: they received what they had agreed to. The reversal comes in what was given to those who worked least. This is due to nothing other than the generosity of the landowner. The gifts of God are just that, pure gift.

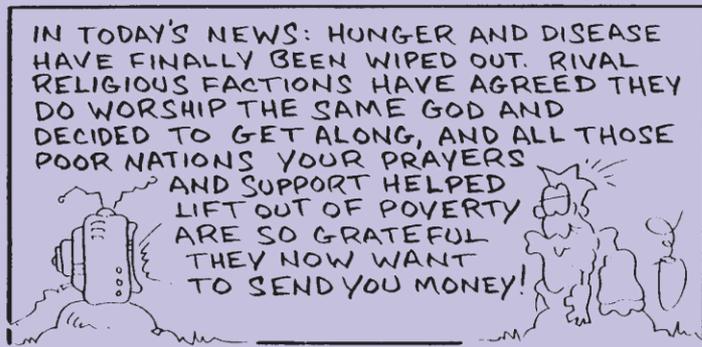
Catholic Social Teaching Principle:

The Social Nature of the Person: Human dignity is realised and fulfilled in community with others and all of creation.

Earth Charter Principle 4:

Secure Earth’s bounty for present and future generations.

Pontius' Puddle



“Everyone’s values are defined by what they will tolerate when it is done to others.”

William Greider

“States are not moral agents, people are and can impose moral standards on powerful institutions.”

Noam Chomsky

FACTFILE

Examples of organizations and ordinary people working for the Reign of God:

- 35 million people world wide came out into the streets in 2002 to oppose the invasion of Iraq. Ordinary people from cities in every continent spoke out then and are still speaking out against the violence of war.
Source: Associated Press
- In 2002, Pope John Paul II invited religious leaders to pray together in Assisi for peace. The result of their historic meeting was the Assisi Declaration signed by 12 world religions and 31 Christian communities.
- The Make Poverty History Campaign this year forged a change in the policy agenda at the G8 Summit in Scotland when 225 000 people formed a white band around the venue at Gleneagles.
www.whiteband.org
- Within three years of receiving partial debt cancellation, Tanzania was able to abolish primary school fees, increase primary school enrolment by 50%; build 2,035 new schools and increase teacher numbers by 106.3%.
www.jubileeaaustralia.org
- The St Vincent de Paul Society has 40,000 members and volunteers in Australia.

‘Ask yourselves what kind of people you want yourselves and your fellow human beings to be, what kind of culture you want to build...

In saying this I wish to point out to you the importance of choices that incorporate values.

Values are the underpinnings of the choices that determine not only your own lives but the policies and strategies that build life in society.

You must decide then what values you want to build society upon... Upon the choices of each one of you today will depend the future of your brothers and sisters.’

Pope John Paul II, World Peace Day Message, 1985, #4, #6.

FOR DISCUSSION

Pray and discuss the great prayer about the Reign of God in the context of today’s society:

Our God who is in heaven
Consider what it really means to know that God is in all people including the extremely poor, the hungry, the oppressed, the excluded, all of creation.

Holy is your name
What do you think this means? How do you hear God’s name being used in society?

Your reign come and your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven

Discuss the signs of the Reign of God you see in your family? In the local community? In Australia? In the global community?

Give us this day our daily bread

Ordinary Australians are said to be ‘aspirational’?

What does this mean? To what do you think average Australians aspire?

Are these aspirations in line with God’s reign?

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us

Think of some examples of where we encounter forgiveness or the lack of it today?

Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil

What do you see as the greatest temptations and evils of the world today?

For yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.

FOR ACTION

- Find out about the major religious feasts for the main world religions. Send a greeting of support to a local mosque, church or temple as they celebrate. Arrange exchange visits.
- Have a market day at your church, group or school to promote the work of people or organizations who work for peace, ecology and justice. Write about them and share with the local media.
- Choose one day of each week on which you will comment only on the positive things that happen in our world at many levels. What response do you get from others?

USEFUL WEBSITES:

- www.unaa.org.au
United Nations Association of Australia
- www.globalstewards.org
Global Stewards
- www.globalexchange.org
Global Exchange
- www.vatican.va/specia/assisi
The Assisi Declaration
- www.corpwatch.org
Corporate Watch
- <http://disciples.unitingchurch.org.au> See Document ‘Following Jesus: Participating in the Reign of God’

