

Friday (A Carthusian)

Purity of heart silences our unruly passions, our clouded egoism. Humility is borne from the truth of ourselves, which we contemplate in the mirror of the Word of God. It is humility that does not give rise to despair but to hope, hope that confides everything in God, not resenting but loving the One who gives us all. Humility disposes us to receive his gifts, his fortitudes, his inspirations, a participation in his knowledge and his love.

Scripture (James 1:5-8).

Any of you who lacks wisdom must ask God, who gives to all generously and without scolding; it will be given. But the prayer must be made with faith, and no trace of doubt, because the person who has doubts is like the waves thrown up in the sea by the buffeting of the wind. That sort of person, in two minds, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

A spare thought, applicable to how Jesus saw the fishermen by the lake, and us in our work?

'A pile of rocks ceases to be rock when someone contemplates it with a cathedral in mind'

(Antoine de Sainte Exupery)

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If you would like more detailed notes from a Scripture group I am privileged to be a part of, please feel free to email me - Martin

3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

'Thy Kingdom Come' - a request and a commitment

When Jesus begins his public ministry, (Matthew 4:12-13), his choice of Capernaum as 'base camp' would be hugely significant to Matthew's readers. This was in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, which were the setting for Isaiah's joyful and triumphant prophecy about God removing the darkness of exile and domination by a foreign power. When Jesus proclaims 'Repent, the Kingdom of Heaven is close at hand', Matthew is showing him as the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy, and that God's long-awaited intervention was imminent.

For many years, I was rather misled by 'The Kingdom of Heaven', thinking it was concerned with 'going to heaven', but it is referring to the reign of God on earth, which God would establish through his 'Chosen One'. Our Christian belief, then, is that Jesus established God's Kingdom on earth - which means that saying 'Thy Kingdom come' is not about looking hopefully to the future.

If it came with Jesus, though, why is the world in the state it's in? two common answers are it is either evidence that God can't be real, or, as some Christians argue, that Jesus did his job but we've messed it all up. Both argue from the assumption that Jesus brought in the Kingdom as a complete product - but by looking at how Jesus began his ministry, it is clear that he had other ideas.

The first point to note is when he began - after John had been arrested. As his 'warm up' man, John had done a good job of getting people ready for the coming Kingdom, but many belonged to factions who expected God to come in power and establish his Kingdom along earthly lines.. By beginning with the same phrase John had used, ('Repent, the Kingdom is close'), Jesus was clearly picking up the baton, but however he built the Kingdom, it would be in a divided world with powerful political and religious groups each with their own expectations ready to be fulfilled. Jesus' time in the desert had convinced him that it meant something else, as is perhaps clearly shown by his choice of co-workers: four fishermen - no prior training, no qualification or interview process, no retreat into isolation to learn. All that was required was trust in Jesus, (they were leaving everything and heading into the unknown) and a wholehearted response. When I focus on them leaving their jobs and homes, I feel slightly worried that my faith might not be strong enough if the same was asked of me, but this is reading the Gospel as though the Resurrection hadn't happened: Jesus needed people to follow him because he could only be in one place at a time. Now he comes to us where we are - 'I and my Father will come and make a home in you' - if we are open to him. We don't need to go anywhere or leave anything to follow his call!

We do, though, need to make the same open and wholehearted response. Saying 'Thy Kingdom come' is a not a wish, it's an answer to this daily call. I need to follow it with 'thy will be done on earth', rather than 'when I'm ready', or 'I'm available tomorrow after 6 o'clock', or 'when others start'.

I'm not sure I can be whole-hearted yet, but it is worth remembering that Jesus needed time to teach his followers. I am not called to be an apostle: I am called to be a disciple, which means 'learner' or 'pupil'. This is perhaps why Jesus said the first step is to 'repent': to put God's ways rather than the world's at the heart of my ambitions and decisions so I can learn to say 'thy kingdom' and not mean 'my kingdom'. Martin Bennett

Monday (Jean Vanier)

When people have started on the journey towards wholeness, there is a moment when their deepest being has been touched. I am sometimes very sad when I feel that people don't take this fundamental experience of the call seriously enough. These people do not believe in either themselves or the call; they do not know that there is a spring within them waiting to be freed to irrigate our parched world. So many people do not know the beauty of the life that is in them and which can grow.

Scripture (Jeremiah 24:5-7).

Yahweh says this, "I mean to concern myself with the welfare of the exiles whom I have sent from this place. My eyes will watch over them for their good, to bring them back to this country, to build them up and not to break them down, to plant them and not to uproot them. I shall give them a heart to acknowledge that I am Yahweh. They will be my people and I shall be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.

Tuesday (John Main, OSB)

Many of you already know that to set out on the journey from self-centredness into God-centredness takes a certain recklessness. We may not be happy with our self-centredness but at least its unhappiness is predictable. Many of you know the occasional moments of anger, grief or sense of absurdity that occur as we find that the way to knowledge is the way of unknowing. The power by which we followed this path is not our own and so these moments of trial hold no ultimate sway over us. As we go through them the recklessness with which we started the journey is transformed into generosity and largeness of heart.

Scripture (Matthew 4:17-20).

Jesus began his proclamation with the message, 'Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.' As he was walking by the Lake of Galilee he saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and his brother Andrew; they were making a cast in the lake with their net, for they were fishermen. And he said, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.' And at once they left their nets and followed him.

Wednesday (Albert Schweitzer)

He comes to us as one unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, he came to those men who knew him not. He speaks to us the same word "Follow me!" and sets us the same tasks which he has to fulfill for our time. And to those who obey him, whether they be wise or simple, he will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through, and as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience who he is.

Scripture (Isaiah 9:1-3).

The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light; on the inhabitants of a country in shadow dark as death light has blazed forth. You have enlarged the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at harvest time, as they exult when they are dividing the spoils. For the yoke that weighed on it, the bar across its shoulders, the rod of its oppressor, these you have broken as on the day at Midian.

Thursday (General Synod of the Anglican church in Canada.)

Making plans does not produce vision. Seeking a fresh vision is a spiritual quest that involves living in ambiguity, waiting on God, dying to old ways, letting the spirit blow where she will and being resurrected to face a new day in a new way. Grasping a new vision requires "letting go" and being open to transformation. Making plans without waiting for the prophetic voice will result in restructuring of what is and not transformation.

Scripture (Psalm 33:13-18, 20-21).

From heaven Yahweh looks down, he sees all the children of Adam, from the place where he sits he watches all who dwell on the earth; he alone moulds their hearts, he understands all they do. A large army will not keep a king safe, nor his strength save a warrior's life; it is delusion to rely on a horse for safety, for all its power it cannot save. But see how Yahweh watches over those who fear him, those who rely on his faithful love. We are waiting for Yahweh; he is our help and our shield, for in him our heart rejoices, in his holy name we trust.