



FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY AUSTRALIA DAY

January 26th, 2020

Glimpsing the Kingdom Between Hope and the Real – Bridging the Gap



The Tower of Babel, An Image of Utopia, Pieter Bruegel, the Elder, 1563

Epiphany is the season when we celebrate and deepen our understanding of the meaning and implications of Christmas – to use the old Hebrew idea, “when God comes to pitch his tent among us”, interpreted in turn by the Christian Church as “God for us” (*Deo pro nobis*). Epiphany also depicts this idea of God’s presence among us in Jesus Christ, as the Light in the darkness. This idea of light is what Christian mission is all about. At its best, the Church is a “light on the hill”, illuminating the world, a task which includes, uncovering, unmasking what in any given time and place, the forms and expressions that darkness takes. This does not mean that the Church has some sort of magical, crystal ball, through which it automatically discerns what light and darkness look like. Clearly the discerning process, reading the signs of the times, must include both prayer, and intelligent listening to the world, to the multiple voices within it, as well as to God. It is this mix, that enables the Church to offer insight as few other institutions can.

Part of the challenge for Christians in any time, is to gain a sense of the world as it should be – what we refer to as the kingdom – and the world as it is. As missionaries, attempting to give expression to the kingdom of God in the real world, through evangelical values such as justice, peace and love, we are always caught. On the one hand, we hope and strive for something new, but we are faced with the limits of what seems to be possible, in large part shaped by what has been done in the past – our history: we are sandwiched between hope and reality (“the real”).

The Gospel reading today from Matthew, the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12), is about the Kingdom, its values and its risks. It presents a world-view which is very different to the usual constructions from ideologies that are usually centred upon power. This morning we explore the difference and the struggle of missioning, evangelizing in the real world.

GATHERING

Lighting the Candle

In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with
And also with you

God has given us a Light for all nations:
that we may live out the salvation offered to all
that peace with justice may reach every corner of the earth.

This is the mission of the Christian church!

Hymn: Christ be our Light

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
Light for the world to see.

Chorus:

***Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light! Shine in your Church
Gathered today.***

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us
Make us your living voice.

Chorus

Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,

Shared until all are fed.

Chorus

Longing for shelter people are homeless.
 Longing for warmth, many are cold.
 Make us your building, sheltering others,
 Walls made of living stone.

Chorus

Many the gifts, many the people,
 Many the hearts that yearn to belong.
 Let us be servants to one another,
 Making your kingdom come.

Chorus

Bernadette Farrell

Glimpsing the Kingdom

In this meditation I am trying to give colour and content to what the kingdom might look like - a metaphor of sorts: a beam of light which comes from the most unexpected source, a grieving elderly man who has lost his lifelong partner. In the greyness of reality, in this pain, in this sorrow, light shines, and hope lives. I have grounded this in the Gospel reading for today, the Beatitudes of Matthew's Gospel, the opening to the Sermon on the Mount.

The grieving widower sat at the restaurant table.
 His wife of 43 years had died
 the previous week.
 The young couple at the next table
 were strangers to him,
 but somehow
 they reminded him of happiness
 he and his wife had long shared.

The widower signalled to the waitress.
 The bill for the couple's meal
 was delivered to the widower's table.

On a napkin, he wrote a note.
He told of dining alone for the first time in 43 years.

He wrote
that paying for their meal
would put a smile on his wife's face
and make him happy, too.
And he wished them a happy new year.

There was the kingdom of heaven

For blessed are the merciful, the meek.
Blessed are the peacemakers, the pure.
Blessed are those who mourn
yet whose ongoing love
comforts themselves and others.
And blessed are those whose joy
in doing right creates
nourishment in this hungering world.

Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

O God,
Free us from our insecurities and fears,
to become light in darkness
hope in reality.
That we may live the kingdom

So that the kingdom may become ours!

The Peace

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Some Insights about the Kingdom of God

Our faith is stronger than death, our philosophy is firmer than flesh, and the spread of the Kingdom of God upon the earth is more sublime and more compelling. **Dorothy Day**

The whole point of the kingdom of God is Jesus has come to bear witness to the true truth, which is nonviolent. When God wants to take charge of the world, he doesn't send in the tanks. He sends in the poor and the meek. **NT Wright**

We would like a church that again asserts that God, not nations, rules the world, that the boundaries of God's kingdom transcend those of Caesar, and that the main political task of the church is the formation of people who see clearly the cost of discipleship and are willing to *pay the price.*” **Stanley Hauerwas**

Micah 6:1-8 (The Message)

Marian Kingham

Like most prophets, Micah was a poet, and some of his words are among the most well-known and well-loved sayings cited by supporters of social justice in the modern era. Chapter 6 is addressed not just to the southern kingdom of Judah, which had a better track-record, when it came to living out the Hebrew faith vision of justice and equality among its citizens, but especially to the northern kingdom of Israel, known for its greater prosperity centred in an ancient free-market philosophy, with all the injustice it produced. The scene is a courtroom, and the people of Israel are on trial. These well-known verses sound a call to a standard of faith practice where corruption and exploitation have no part. Micah is critical of faith that immerses itself in piety and religious observance that serve as just a mask or cover for self-righteousness and exploitive behaviour. Micah tells us that what God requires, is a sacrifice of the heart and spirit which is to be expressed both in social dimensions through justice and a more accurate sense of self expressed in humility.

What God Is Looking For (The Message)

6 ¹⁻² Listen now, listen to GOD:

“Take your stand in court.

If you have a complaint, tell the mountains;
make your case to the hills.

And now, Mountains, hear GOD's case;
 listen, Jury Earth—
 For I am bringing charges against my people.
 I am building a case against Israel.
³⁻⁵ “Dear people, how have I done you wrong?
 Have I burdened you, worn you out? Answer!
 I delivered you from a bad life in Egypt;
 I paid a good price to get you out of slavery.
 I sent Moses to lead you—
 and Aaron and Miriam to boot!
 Remember what Balak king of Moab tried to pull,
 and how Balaam son of Beor turned the tables on him.
 Remember all those stories about Shittim and Gilgal.
 Keep all GOD's salvation stories fresh and present.”
⁶⁻⁷ How can I stand up before GOD
 and show proper respect to the high God?
 Should I bring an armload of offerings
 topped off with yearling calves?
 Would GOD be impressed with thousands of rams,
 with buckets and barrels of olive oil?
 Would he be moved if I sacrificed my firstborn child,
 my precious baby, to cancel my sin?
⁸ But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do,
 what GOD is looking for in men and women.
 It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbour,
 be compassionate and loyal in your love,
 And don't take yourself too seriously—
 take God seriously.

The word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Matthew 5:1-12 (New International Version)

Gilda Dornan

Matthew's beatitudes, the beginning point for his Sermon on the Mount, carry the same ethos as does the more original version coming from Luke. In Luke's construct (6:20-26), Jesus addresses himself to the poverty of the great majority of the Hebrew-Galilean world: the kingdom which he brings is good news for the poor, hungry, and depressed, good news for the broken, for those who know what oppression involves. In Matthew, these original promises of Jesus have undergone some change. The focus in Matthew's congregation, people of some affluence, is less on the victims as in Luke, and more on the affluent who need to be challenged to take up new social

attitudes, a new world-view, that responds to the poor and marginalized: to be poor *in spirit*, to yearn to be just in what they do. Matthew's message is that if you want to meaningfully and credibly enter the kingdom, there are attitudes and behaviours that you need to develop.

5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them.

He said:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Christ

Hymn: Blessed Assurance: Something that May Stir Memories 😊

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

Refrain:

*This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Savior all the day long;
this is my story, this is my song,
praising my Savior all the day long.*

Perfect submission, perfect delight!
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels descending bring from above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Refrain

Perfect submission, all is at rest!
I in my Savior am happy and blessed,
Watching and waiting, looking above,
Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

Refrain**Film Clip: “Bran Nue Dae” (55:55-59:05)**

“Bran Nue Dae” is a 2009 Australian musical comedy-drama film directed by Rachel Perkins and written by Perkins and Reg Cribb. It is based upon the 1990 stage musical *Bran Nue Dae* by Jimmy Chi. On the face of it, the film tells the story of the coming of age of an Aboriginal Australian teenager, Willie Johnson, on a road trip in the late 1960s. At a deeper level however, the story is about Australia and Australians finding our sense-of-self, coming to an understanding of who we are. Central to the theme is the insight that we as individuals, that we as communities, that we as a national community, must be transparent about our skeletons in the cupboard, our brokenness, our sins, as a condition for a future together. It is only by confessing our history that we can bridge the gap between our real history and the hope of what we may become. ,

In this clip, Willie finds himself in the lock-up with his uncle. Afraid of the history of indigenous deaths in custody, he fears that will become one. His uncle, calms him and he falls into a disturbed sleep. Meanwhile we begin to hear a song – part of dreamtime wisdom – where his uncle, sings of the interconnectedness of time and generations, of the challenge to understand and atone for the past so that we can build bridges to a new future: “listen to the news talking of the blues of our people” and at the end “Is this the end, is this the end of our people”?

Some thoughts...Being light in Australia

Let’s Give our Offerings,

Doxology

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,

***praise him, all creatures here below,
praise him above, ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

Prayer of Dedication

Amen

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

Seng Eng Low

The one who offers prayers this morning, concludes each section with the words,
“May we be the bridges between hope and reality”! Our response is “May we be the kingdom”!

***Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.***

***Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.***

***For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.***

하늘에 계신 우리 아버지여
이름이 거룩히 여김을 받으시오며
나라이 임하옵시며
뜻이 하늘에서 이룬 것 같이
땅에서도 이루어지이다.
오늘날 우리에게 일용할 양식을 주옵시고
우리가 우리에게
죄 지은 자를 사하여 준 것 같이

우리 죄를 사하여 주옵시고
 우리를 시험에 들게 하지 마옵시고
 다만 악에서 구하옵소서
 대개 나라와 권세와 영광이
 아버지께 영원히 있사옵나이다. 아멘

Hymn: Lead Us from Death to Life (World Peace Prayer, Marty Haugen, New Century Hymnal 581)

*Lead us from death to life
 from falsehood to truth
 from despair to hope,
 from fear to trust.
 Lead us from hate to love,
 from war to peace;
 let peace fill our hearts,
 let peace fill our world,
 let peace fill our universe.*

Still all the angry cries,
 still all the angry guns,
 still now your people die,
 earth's sons and daughters.
 Let justice roll,
 let mercy pour down,
 come and teach us your way of compassion

Refrain

So many lonely hearts,
 so many broken lives,
 longing for love to break into their anguish.
 Come teach us love,
 come teach us peace,
 come and teach us your way of compassion

Refrain

Let justice ever roll,
 let mercy fill the earth,
 let us begin to grow into your people.
 We can be love,
 we can bring peace,
 we can still be your way of compassion

Refrain

The text for the refrain of this hymn is known as “the World Peace Prayer”. It is a paraphrase of a verse from the Upanishads, the most ancient scripture of Hinduism. Since its introduction at a service at Westminster Abbey on Hiroshima Day 1981, the prayer has been translated into numerous languages and circulated around the world. The musical setting and additional stanzas were composed by Marty Haugen, composer in residence at Mayflower United Church of Christ, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA.

Blessing

Our faith is stronger than death,
 our philosophy is firmer than flesh.

Go into the world in peace;
 be of good courage;
 hold fast to that which is good;
 render to no one evil for evil;
 strengthen the fainthearted;
 support the weak;
 help the afflicted;
 honour everyone.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

Amen

**Closing Blessing: Shalom to you now (TIS 778, Spanish melody,
 Elise Shoemaker Eslinger)**

Musical Postlude

Pianist:

Rosemary Osborne



A historical map of the globe with the “Great South Land” as imagined. It was a place that fed the utopian dreams of the western world, a place where people hoped the mistakes of the ‘old world’ would not be repeated.

