

# Along the track

## Thy Kingdom Come (Fourth and final meditation on the Kingdom)

In a recent episode of Compass about the building of an asylum seeker detention centre near a small rural community, many of the locals were bitterly opposed to having 'these people' anywhere near them. 'Give them a match and tell them to set fire to themselves' was one of the milder comments. It was deeply depressing and shocking. A group of local knitters decided to make beanies and take them to people who had been incarcerated. Over the weeks and months, it was moving to see the transformation that took place among those women and the effect on their new friends. That was the kingdom at work – promoting understanding, transforming attitudes, working for fairness and justice at the local level. Still a long way to go, but at least a start has been made.

Jesus preached personal conversion as the first step in bringing about the reign of God. God's Kingdom is not simply something for the future but rather we are called to help bring it about now. In the flesh, as it were, it is a multi-dimensional kingdom, in touch with the modern world, working for justice and fairness through all the means at its disposal – social, religious, political, working to eliminate systemic practices that result in unfairness, injustice, poverty.

The Church is not the Kingdom of God – it is much broader than one institution but the Kingdom of God shapes the mission of the Church which, according to Vatican II, "has a single intention: that God's Kingdom may come..." (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, #45).

When we pray, "Thy Kingdom come," we are praying that the human family be transformed into a more just and loving community. By working for justice, to remove oppression, poverty, disease, discrimination from the world, we are allowing God's Kingdom and God's presence to be manifested now and for people to experience something of what Jesus imagined for us, that we have life to the full.

Pope Francis is acutely aware of the problems of third-world poverty and the Church's role in promoting social justice. Just as Jesus identified with those in distress, the hungry, naked, those in prison, the sick, the ostracized, the Pope is calling not just Catholics, but all people of goodwill, to focus on the pressing task of social transformation for a fairer world. For him, work for social justice and promoting human wellbeing are not optional extras to the Gospel, but at the heart of Christian faith.

Pope Francis is encouraging people as individuals and groups to do what they can, especially by making direct personal contact with the poor and marginalised, as he did himself walking the streets of poor districts in his city. But he is also calling on all of us to work to reform the global forces that determine the fate of millions of lives, and these must be reformed to ensure decent life opportunities for everyone. These too are part of our Gospel commitment, our commitment to make 'thy kingdom come'.

Pope Francis is urging a renewed commitment to solidarity among peoples:

This word, 'solidarity', is too often forgotten or silenced, because it is uncomfortable. It almost seems like a bad word... solidarity. I would like to make an appeal to those in possession of greater resources, to public authorities, and to all people of goodwill who are working for social justice: never tire of working for a more just world, marked by greater solidarity. No one can remain insensitive to the inequalities that persist in our world. We need an enduring peace in our communities, one that brings genuine social justice... do not lose hope. (*The Tablet* 3 August 2013).

Jesus used imagination often, not in some Pollyanna fashion but to help people see what life could be like, indeed what life ought to be like. Rather than sticking with old images and old ways, he asked us to re-imagine who we are and who God is, what we are doing here and what God is trying to do in our lives. He used parables and stories to help us transform these images that sustain and motivate us – the story of the Prodigal Son challenged the dominant image of God. The story of the Good Samaritan challenged the current image of who could be saved, who was the bearer of God's goodness and generosity. Bringing about the Kingdom involves re-imagining life with and through another person, walking in another's shoes.

Too often today the mass media dominates how we see ourselves, what society looks like or how we should or should not act. It can distort reality so easily. There is a danger that makes it easy to cultivate unreal fantasies that avoid the drama of life, that avoid reality, that can even demonize those who are in need of our care. You should look like this or that, you must have this or that for true happiness... people who cannot find work are dole bludgers, people who seek refuge on our shoes are 'illegal', they simply want to subvert our way of life and so on.

That's why Pope Francis echoes Jesus' call to walk in another's shoes, his call to solidarity. Solidarity is uncomfortable, it is challenging and difficult because it calls us to come to understand them and to imagine with them what life could be like, to use our imagination to see how we might work together to bring about 'life to the full' for all of us.

The mission of the Church (and therefore our mission) is to proclaim that the Kingdom of God *has already come*. We, the Church, are called to be a living and vibrant model, a sign of the reality of the Kingdom of God so that people today, both inside and outside the community of faith, might look at this model and know that God is still here, that the reign of God is a presence, a movement for healing, for reconciliation, for justice, for peace, for freedom.

Regards  
Jim Quillinan

Email: [jquillinan@dcsi.net.au](mailto:jquillinan@dcsi.net.au)