

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Jul 12th 2018

Three times in Matthew's Gospel Jesus gives us the same message: "The Kingdom of God is at hand." At hand indicates 'nearby.' Perhaps Jesus wants us to understand not that the end of our lives is near, but that the Kingdom is near. So near that all we have to do is realize we are in it now.

In today's gospel, Jesus tells us that the Kingdom – Paradise – is near, and in the next sentence, gives us our assignments: cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons.

In his book *Barking to the Choir*, Jesuit priest Greg Boyle, S.J. writes that "Paradise is not a place that awaits our arrival, but a present we arrive at. A place, in fact, we are already in. How many chances a day are we given to recognize this – an opportunity to practice sacred presence?"

We find Paradise by opening our hearts to the people around us. By recognizing how sacred and beloved by God each person we meet really is, it changes our interactions.

We already have all we need. Jesus cautions us against feeling we need some special equipment or training: "Do not take gold or silver or copper for your belts; no sack for the journey, or a second tunic, or sandals, or walking stick."

We have what we need to be in the Kingdom, except an awareness of that. It takes practice to be aware. Each morning we can ask Jesus for the focus and open heart to really encounter each person we come across. In the smallest interaction, we can look into the eyes of the person we are with, as we really see the person, the life before us, recognizing the person before us is as beloved by God as deeply as we are beloved. That is when miracles can begin. Healing of the sick, might mean reaching out to someone we are angry with or who annoys us. It might mean healing of our impatience with others. Our mindful love for others might cleanse the lepers of judgement and drive out demons of anger.

Fr. Boyle writes, "The discovery that awaits us is that Paradise is contained in the here and now. We let go of the desire to expect anything beyond it. The awareness of this keeps us from the suffering generated by resisting life as it is." Boyle adds, "If your anchor is not centered in today, then you'll blink and miss the delight of this very moment, which is always with us and is the perfect teacher."

The beautiful reading from Hosea offers an image of God loving as deeply as a parent. "When Israel was a child I loved him... It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, who took them in my arms." And in a phrase that is inexplicably moving, God assures us, "I drew them with human cords, with bands of love," and gives us the image of tenderly raising an infant to his cheeks.

God's love for us is not an intellectual situation but a personal love for us as individuals. We are loved by God beyond what we can comprehend, and today Jesus invites us into a taste of sharing that kind of love by being present and being aware of the sacredness in this present moment. "Whatever town or village you enter, look for a worthy person in it," Jesus tell us, but in the world and love of Jesus, every person is a worthy person.

And so, Jesus advises, "wish them peace."

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