

SEASON OF PENTECOST
“Life ~ A Constant Treasure Hunt”

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Seek Ye First – The Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God is like a treasure
hidden in a field

The Kingdom of God is like a pearl
that is worth investing all you have into
The Kingdom of God

I love all of the metaphors
that Jesus uses for the Kingdom of God...
the Kingdom of God
here on earth
is central to the teachings of Jesus...
just as the Golden Rule is central –
for to live the Golden Rule
is to begin to discover the hidden gems
that are waiting to be found

“Do unto others
as you would have them do unto you...”

Can you imagine what this world would be like
if we truly lived that treasure of the Golden Rule.
A treasure too often buried
beneath our self centeredness.

Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God...
the gospel writer we call Matthew –
includes these delightful images
of the Kingdom of God
with another image –
an image that he uses more than any other gospel writer –
one that doesn’t sit very comfortably
with our modern mindset –
he talks of the judgment
that will come
and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This theme of judgment
shows up in Matthew
much more than the other gospels.
In the modern world –
using threats of punishment
to modify behaviour
is not considered a helpful methodology for parents,
or for others.
Matthew repeatedly wields
the threat of judgment
as a motivating force.
Since this approach is now rarely used in our day –
it is wise for us to look at
what Matthew was trying
to do to see if and how it connects to our lives.

Weeping and gnashing of teeth –
(when looked at through the lens
of other such scriptural references)
is intended to be a vivid description
of despairing remorse
shaking a whole person's body.
For Matthew it is a "word picture"
of terrible grief.
For Matthew's hearers the phrase had "shock value".
For them,
the shock did not lie
in the idea of judgment –
but with the idea
that those they thought of as insiders
were ultimately the ones judged.
Those who thought of themselves
as God's chosen or favoured ones
suddenly had to face the shock
of being numbered as weeds
amongst the wheat,
fish rejected from the net,
wedding guests who rejected their host.
The shock is intended to shock
the complacent out of their self-confidence...
It was more a word of warning
rather than a literal prediction of what could be.

Matthew is clear...
the actions and choices
of believers and unbelievers alike

will be subject to judgment...
the fruit of our lives
will be subject to judgment ...
What that means to me
is that the actions and choices
and fruit of my life
are subject to judgment...
in every moment of my life –
because my own higher wisdom –
that higher power that I try to connect to
for as much of each days as I can –
is always there –
always with me
to help me choose actions
and make choices that will
produce fruits of the Spirit
that are a blessing rather than a curse.
So if we're feeling grumbly
toward someone for example...
need help to not send grumbles
but mercy to another driver,
politician, family member, church member and us.
One of the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven –
which is the Kingdom of God here on earth –
one of the tools of the Kingdom of Heaven
is a measuring stick we are given
to help us discern
whether we are living
according to the “righteousness” to which we are called.

This theme of judgment in Matthew
is woven with the theme of mercy
that we can hope for
in God that calls us to live mercy and compassion.

The Kingdom of God – the Kingdom of Heaven....

When Jesus spoke
of the Kingdom of God
his language was charged
with urgent political,
religious and cultural electricity
of the power of God's reign
rather than the powerful
who trod upon the weak.
When we speak of the Kingdom of God today –

the original electricity
is largely gone
and in its place we can find
a tired familiarity
that inspires not hope and excitement
as it did in Jesus' day – but anxiety and boredom.

So if Jesus were amongst us today
teaching –
what kind of language might he choose
for these times to describe what he meant
back then as the Kingdom of God.
Author Bruce McLaren
suggests a few images that work for today.

Instead of the Kingdom of God.. The Dream of God

“The call to faith
is the call to treat God and God's dreams
enough to realign our dreams with God's –
to dream our little dreams
within God's big dream.
And so we are called
to continuously receive God's dream,
and to learn to live the way God dreams for us to live.”

Another choice
for today to capture
the essence of the Kingdom of God could be:

The Revolution of God

“For people like Martin Luther King Jr.,
attuned to fighting injustice,
corruption, oppression, racism,
and other forms of social evil.
The “revolution” or “revolutionary movement”
of God naturally flows
from the metaphor of the dream of God for creation.”

The Mission of God could be another –
at the root of the word mission
is the meaning “to be sent”.
We have a task to do for God.

Imagine that everyone on earth
has been infected with a horrible virus.
The virus makes people physically sick
and mentally unstable.
It's symptoms vary from person to person
and place to place...
in some places it causes violence,
in another sexual aggression, in another lying.

Imagine someone develops a cure.
She bring the cure to you
and says
"Once you take this medicine
you'll begin to feel better,
but I'm not giving you the cure for your sake.
Once you feel better –
you need to make more of the cure
and bring it to other people –
and tell them the same thing:
they are being healed
not just so they can be healthy
but so they can become
healers for the sake of others.

The Mission of God –
the Kingdom of God
spread through the tiniest of actions.

Other images – the Party of God.

One church demonstrated this metaphor
in a dramatic and fun way ...
using trash cans
and old pots they created a joyful,
loud sound
and people in that poor area of town
gathered together
for the fun and
then they served up food
like a feast at a party ...
as they fed the hungry

Or what about
"The Network of God".
God is inviting people into a life-giving network.
First, God wants people to be connected,

plugged in,
in communication with God –
so God can transfer to them what they need –
not just information but virus –debugging software,
along with love, hope, empowerment, purpose and wisdom.
And then by being connected to God
that means we also need to become integrally connected to all others.
In this way
God breaks down the walls
of smaller, exclusive networks.

The final image that McLaren suggests
is the Dance of God ...
in this image the universe was created
to be an expression and extension of the dance of God –
so all creation share
in the dynamic joy of movement, love, vitality, harmony and celebration.
But we humans broke with the dance.
We stamp on the toes of other dancers,
ignore the rhythm,
reject the grace
and generally make a mess of things.
But God keeps sending the message
of Jesus into the world
that models for us a way of living
in the rhythm of God's music of love...
and as the story is told
and lived
people are attracted to the beauty
of the steps that invite us to rejoin the dance.

The Kingdom of God
is like a mustard seed, the tiniest of seeds –
that is actually a weed –
plant it and it can take over –
the fields of our lives
filling them with grace and compassion
where before there was none.

The Kingdom of Heaven –
here on earth is like yeast –
mix in the message
of the power of hope
and everything rises (church bread).

The Kingdom of God
is life hidden treasures...
there are so many treasures
all around us that we just keep missing –
whether we are blocking out the treasures
by our preconceived notions
about the worth of another,
or because we think we could do a better job
and so we become excessively critical of others,
or just because we haven't taught
ourselves to notice the treasures.

Anthony De Millo tells the story
of some people who were stranded
out on a raft off the coast of Brazil.
They were perishing from thirst.
What they didn't realize
is that they were actually floating in fresh water
because of a nearby river
that flowed with such force
that it pushed fresh water
out to sea for a couple of miles.

In the same way,
says De Mello, we're surrounded with joy,
with hope, with love.

Most people,
he concludes have no idea –
we simply don't have eyes,
hearts and minds
that see it or are open
to all the goodness that is all around us.

There's a legend
of some travelers
who stopped at a river
after crossing a vast dessert on their horses.

A voice spoke to them saying
pick up the pebbles
and fill your pockets.

And at the end of your journey
on the far side of the wilderness –
you will be both glad and sorry.

And so they did as the voice said
and at the end of their long treacherous journey
they emptied their pockets
and there they found diamonds and rubies.

And so they were glad
and also sorry they hadn't taken more.
Hidden treasures –
amazing when we discover them
and sad when we realize how much we have missed.

There is a story of a man
who went hiking
and found a cave.
Inside the cave he found some clay balls.
He took the clay balls
and when he got back
to the ocean shore –
he began to throw them into the ocean
as far as he could –
like you would with stones.
Then he dropped one of the clay balls
and it cracked open
and he discovered a beautiful precious stone.
All the rest were the same –
totally thousands of dollars worth of treasure
in those remaining balls of clay –
with tens of thousands of dollars worth of treasure
already tossed in the sea in the 50-60 other clay balls.

It's like that with people.
We look at someone –
including ourselves,
and we see the external clay vessel.
It doesn't look like much on the outside.
It isn't always beautiful
or sparkling so we discount it.
But too often
we have not taken the time
to find the treasure hidden
inside that person, or in a situation.

I love the story
in the Observer this month
of the minister
who is called in to do a wedding
because someone saw
a very angry bride and groom and wedding guests
standing outside a church door.
As the fill in minister began the service –
he asked everyone to join the posse

who had perfect memory
and had never forgotten an appointment in their life.
And he invited the people
to look for the treasure
in the moment
reminding them
they'd be able to retell this story
again and again over the years amidst laughter.

Life is a constant treasure hunt.
Some of the people
I have found who find the treasure the best –
because they are able
to let go of what does not matter –
are people who are terminally ill –
if you think about it
the reality is we are all going to die
so if we can live each day _____
treasures that becomes blessings.

There's a wonderful story
that invites us to focus
on what really matters.
A six year old child
at the death of her family's dog
observed this –
"People are born
so that they can learn how to live a good life –
like loving everybody
all the time and being nice right?"
The six year old continued
"Well, dogs already know how to do that,
so they don't have to stay as long."

So, remember if a dog was the teacher –
we would learn things like:

When loved ones come home,
always run to greet them.
Never pass up
the opportunity to go for a joyride.
Allow the experience
of fresh air and the wind
in your face to be pure ecstasy.
Take naps.
Stretch before rising.

Run, romp, and play daily.
Thrive on attention
and let people touch you.
Avoid biting
when a simple growl will do.
On warm days,
stop to lie on your back on the grass.
On hot days,
drink lots of water and lie under a shady tree.
When you're happy,
dance around and wag your entire body.
Delight in the simple joy of a long walk.
Eat with gusto and enthusiasm.
Stop when you have had enough.
Be loyal.
Never pretend
to be something you're not.
If what you want lies buried,
dig until you find it.
When someone is having a bad day,
be silent, sit close by and nuzzle them gently.

Life –
a time to constantly seek
Treasures
and make sure we're sending
treasures and blessings
and not missiles and cursings into the world.

By the power of the Christ Spirit
dancing in our lives – may it be so.

Amen.