

A Kingdom, A Dream, A Gathering (reimagining the church, pt.1)

Intro: When Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God the air was charged with political, religious and cultural electricity. When people heard that term “Kingdom” and then “of God” applied right after it, they would have almost vibrated with excitement.

When we speak of “kingdom”, we don’t get that kind of response. Kingdoms have given way to republics, democracies, and democratic republics. Most kings you see today are anachronisms; throwbacks to an earlier time, irrelevant, ceremonial at best. They don’t exude power and authority like they did in Jesus’ time.

For others, kingdom language evokes patriarchy, chauvinism, imperialism, war, domination, despotism, or tyranny. That is the exact opposite of the kingdom Jesus was speaking into being; a kingdom that would be barrier breaking, liberating, dominion shattering, reconciling.

In fact, if Jesus were here today I don’t think he would use kingdom language at all.

I. The Problem With Kingdom Language

- A.** Jesus referred to the kingdom of God over 128 times in the gospels. It is the thing he mentioned most often (the second being money and material possessions).
- B.** When he spoke of the kingdom, there were values attached to the word that aren’t in our mind. We don’t make the connections that the first century Jews would have made.
 - 1. justice, love, inclusivity, openness.
 - 2. mystery, death
 - 3. shalom, dignity, iconoclasm
- C.** He revealed his kingdom in parables (stories with intentional kingdom applications) and in the quiet way he exercised his authority.
- D.** How would Jesus approach this topic today? In what ways would he finish the sentence, “The kingdom of heaven is like a...”?

II. ...A Dream

- A.** Matthew 6:5-14. This is called a kingdom prayer, for it calls for God to be king de jure and de facto. But we run into problems with that kingdom language again.

- B.** Have you ever re-written this prayer in your own words? How would you re-phrase “your will be done on earth as it is on heaven”? The word “will” comes from the same root as the word “wish” and I like the idea of saying to God – “Let your wish come true on earth, and let me be a part of making it happen.”
- C.** But... that may seem flippant or weak to others. How about “may your dreams for all your creation come true.” I believe that if we think this thought daily, and look at the church and ask what God’s dreams for us are, it will change the way we DO things as well as how we THINK about things.
 1. When someone has great dreams for you, you try to live up to those dreams. (mother, father, coach, teacher)
 2. When we love God and want to please Him, and then we find out He has great dreams for us, it changes the way we view church. It is not a burden, or an activity. It is a stage on which we fulfill the dreams God has for us.
 3. Here, in a group, and at home or at work we ask our hearts to be receptive to the dreams of God for our life and to turn aside from the dreams the world wants to put in front of us (nationalism, consumerism, hedonism, conservatism, liberalism).

III. ...a gathering?

- A.** In Matthew 28:16ff we are called to go into all the world and gather people together. But gather them for what?
- B.** In Acts 2:41ff we get our answer.
- C.** When we speak of “church” or “kingdom”, we might want to adjust our terminology and speak instead of “the gathering.”
 1. The Geico commercials where the gecko stresses the party, the exclusivity, the important of the invitation.
 2. This is the great invitation to a gathering, to a place where you are treasured, our goods are shared, and where the doors are open (the current Methodist Church advertisements: “where our doors, our hearts, and our minds are always open”).
- D.** Psychologists tell us that all humans need intimacy, meaning, and responsibility. In the Gathering, we have all three. God knew it a long, long time ago. And He calls us to the Gathering.

ADMONITION:

A Prayer for the Sandellas