

The Kingdom of God

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“To find God, then, we must lose God – at least our primitive ideas and images of God.” (p.130) But as we saw in the story about the monk in John Cassian’s *Conferences* to lose one’s image of God is disturbing and painful and leads temporarily to a sense of the absence of God. “Woe is me, wretch that I am! They have taken my God from me, and I have no one to lay hold of, nor do I know whom I should adore or address!” But on our path of contemplative prayer “slowly it dawns that losing the image is the prerequisite of finding the original.” Once we have let go of images and ideas we experience God in the silence of prayer and become aware of His Presence, the Kingdom of God.

The phrase ‘the Kingdom’ is mentioned right at the beginning of the gospel of Mark (1:15), in a saying that many consider to be the essence of Jesus’ teaching: ‘The time has come; the Kingdom of God is upon you; repent and believe the Gospel.’ Like all teaching of Jesus the true meaning only becomes clear through intuitive, experiential understanding. But yet the words used are helpful. The word used for ‘time’ is not ‘chronos’, chronological time but ‘kairos’ God’s time i.e. timelessness, referring to a reality beyond our time and space. This reality is spread ‘in you and amongst you’, (cf Luke 17:21), as most scholars understand the wording ‘upon you’, stressing the Kingdom is not in one particular place but is the Divine, all-pervading Reality of God. Furthermore, we understand the word ‘repent’ now as covering yourself in shame in ‘sackcloth and ashes’, but the original meaning of the word is to ‘rehang your mind’, meaning changing the way you look at reality, which is an outcome of silent prayer. Having parted the veil from ordinary reality to ultimate reality, we see clearly and experience the Kingdom. Then we truly know what is meant by the ‘good news’ that Jesus brought us.

Jesus knew that we would have difficulty understanding what he meant by the Kingdom, as the concept of the Kingdom is as difficult to catch in words as God. Jesus tries to explain therefore what he means through parables. There are four parables that deal specifically with the ‘Kingdom’. All four are included in the three synoptic gospels but not in John’s gospel. Two of them – the ‘Mustard seed’ and the ‘Leaven’ – (Matt 13: 31 -34) show the importance of the Kingdom. In the ‘Leaven’ it emphasizes that it is the essential ingredient in us. Without the ‘leaven’ the dough would not be raised to become bread and a human being does not grow to be ‘fully alive’ without the leaven of the Kingdom of God within. The ‘mustard seed’ stresses its power and extent, which includes all of creation. The ‘Buried Treasure’ and the ‘Pearl’ (Matt 13:44 – 47) both show that nothing happens by itself. We have to be active in becoming aware of the Kingdom within us. Something is expected of us to realize its inestimable value.

The most important aspect of the Kingdom is pointed out by Laurence Freeman: “The kingdom refers to the life of God through relationship with oneself and others... [it] is inextricably involved in relationship and interdependence....Our personal relationship

with God is enshrined in the family of all beings. God is the ground of all being.”
(p.131/133)