

## **SIGNPOSTS SERIES – NO 3**

### **RECEIVING THE KINGDOM**

**Nic Denny-Dimitriou - 17 September 2006**

**Deuteronomy 30:11-20; Mark 1:14-15; John 14:9-11 & 23-24**

\*[Series based upon the book of the same title, by Trevor Hudson]

In the records of what Jesus said and did, we have many things to consider, including a few commands (love one another, do this in remembrance of me); and a number of stories he told to teach us what God's Kingdom was about, some of them beginning with words such as "The kingdom of God is like...."

But one of the most striking things Jesus said was, "The Kingdom of God is at hand." Going about his work, Jesus announced the presence of God's kingdom.

In this third "Signpost", in the series based upon Trevor Hudson's book "Signposts to Spirituality" and subtitled "Towards a closer walk with God", we are invited to consider whether we have acknowledged the Kingdom of God. We are invited to "Receive the Kingdom" – the title of today's sermon.

Jesus has declared it is God's kingdom, and has described God for us in various ways. One is the picture of the Heavenly Father given to us when Jesus told the story we refer to in English as "The Prodigal Son". In that story, the father (representing the heavenly Father) runs down the road towards the returning son, arms open wide to welcome and receive him. He is more interested in welcoming his son back into the fold and arranging a celebration party than in hearing the son's apology for waywardness that took him away in the first place.

The Kingdom is wherever God's will is in place, is acknowledged and honoured and being experienced. Eternal life is inextricably bound up with God's Kingdom – a life characterised by the presence of grace and mercy and the power of the resurrection of Jesus made real in the lives of people who have come to know that they are daughters and sons of the King in whose Kingdom they live.

Jesus is the embodiment of that kingdom. He represents it in the flesh. After a person was delivered from evil, and people criticised Jesus and some wondered if that wasn't a sign of his own evilness, he instead said, "If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you."

"Wherever Jesus ministered in word and deed, the loving will of the Father effectively reigned. When he healed the sick, that was the kingdom of God. When he forgave sins, that was the Kingdom of God. When he shared meals with the outcasts and outsiders of his day, that was the kingdom of God. Hence while God's kingdom has been in existence

right from the very beginning of creation, in the person of Jesus it became clearly visible and was made available to all. Through him, the kingdom of God was indeed at hand.

“And it is at hand for us. We don’t need to wait for the kingdom until we are dead. Our lives can be touched today by its power of resurrection. We can begin learning immediately what it means to live within its presence. Like the earliest disciples we can experience its gradual transformation of our everyday lives...(even in) those situations where it is seemingly absent. But first we must receive it.” (Hudson p48)

Jesus said, “Do not be anxious, it is your Father’s pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). But Jesus also declared (Mark 1:15): “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news.”

So we need briefly to do two things: To consider what it is to repent, and to believe.

### **Repentance**

I find the original Greek word for this helpful. *Metanoia* – usually translated into English as repentance – means a change of transformation, and suggests something deeper than changed behaviour or actions. It implies a return to God, and a transformed way of thinking and looking at everything.

The use of the word repentance in English is sometimes distorted. It is not about putting ourselves down, being pre-occupied with our sinfulness, or about feeling sorry for ourselves. “True repentance ... involves the complete turnabout of our mind and outlook that turns us in a new direction, changes our distorted attitudes and gives our lives a new centre from which a new kind of life begins” to emerge (Hudson p.50).

Repentance turns us in a new direction, towards Jesus, in order to receive the gifts of the kingdom freely offered by Jesus. That is a continual process, not a once-for-all moment of conversion. A 4thC Christian leader, Anthony, apparently said, “Every morning again I say to myself, today I start.”

Repentance changes distorted attitudes, which we acquire in life and which determine how we perceive reality. If our attitudes are out of line with the Creator of the universe, then they will hinder us from living the life God intended. Instead, we begin to “think differently about God. We think differently about material things... about ourselves and others... We see God’s creation and everything in it as sacred” (Joseph Girzone, in Hudson p51).

Repentance also challenges the idea, which we carry from birth onwards, that I am at the centre of the universe, and my needs are the only ones that count. That kind of self-centredness sabotages everything, including every type of relationship.

Hudson says, realistically, “(This) does not happen without a struggle. When we put God at the hub of our lives, we find ourselves exposed to the blazing light of his self-giving love” and realise how much our sin condition has permeated our life and affected

ourselves and others around us. He describes some of his own battles with this, and then says how he has learnt to “return to Christ who never leaves me” so that he may again receive grace.

### **Believing**

If repenting is one aspect, the other is “to believe” – not the word in its dry Western application, but in its much fuller sense of affirming very particular things about Jesus, entrusting ourselves to him and learning what it now means to live as a member of God’s kingdom.

To rehash an oft-said point, if believing in Jesus meant only an intellectual acknowledgement of his existence, then it could be said that even the devil believed in Jesus. But something much deeper than this is implied.

To begin with, we believe certain things about Jesus, not just because a Creed of the Church has been given to us to tell us what we ought to believe, but because Jesus made it clear that, through him, God had stepped personally into human history. He said, “Whoever has seen me has the Father ... Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” (John 14:9-10)

To believe also involves surrendering ourselves to the risen and crucified one. Repentance may turn our focus back towards God, and refashion our attitudes and values in life; believing relinquishes our lives into the loving hands of God, and allows Christ to become the Lord whom we follow.

This is never easy, cannot be forced in one movement, and in fact takes a lifetime. “Genuine belief seldom comes quickly or without struggle. We learn to trust God” (Hudson p55, emphasis mine).

The remaining sermons in this series will help us to understand how we can learn to trust in God, and how we can walk with Jesus, living the Kingdom way

I close with these words from Trevor Hudson: “To believe in Jesus involves therefore learning how to live our lives in the kingdom as he did when he walked the roads of Palestine. This does not mean trying to copy the historical life of Jesus. That would lead us into the most deadly forms of legalism. Rather it means committing ourselves to Christ, immersing ourselves in his example and teaching as it comes to us in the four gospels and learning from him how to put into practice what we see there. We do not attempt this relying on our own strength. Our commitment, Jesus has promised us, will bring his constant presence into our everyday lives as a living and tangible reality. ‘Those who love me will keep my word’ said Jesus, ‘and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them’ (John 14:23).”

ENDS

**[Relate this to the prayers, communion, and concluding prayers]**