

The Prodigal / 6.26.11

Sermon: "Thy Kingdom Come - But Please Come Quick!" – by Fr. Bill W.

The first reading is taken from the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous:

When we became alcoholics (and addicts), crushed by a self-imposed crisis we could not postpone or evade, we had to fearlessly face the proposition that either God is everything or else He is nothing. God either is or He isn't. What was our choice to be?

Arrived at this point, we were squarely confronted with the question of faith. We couldn't duck the issue. Some of us had already walked far over the Bridge of Reason toward the desired shore of faith. The outlines and the promise of the New Land had brought luster to tired eyes and fresh courage to flagging spirits. Friendly hands had stretched out in welcome....

Imagine life without faith! Were nothing left but pure reason; it wouldn't be life. For deep down in every man, woman, and child, is the fundamental idea of God. It may be obscured by calamity, by pomp, by worship of other things, but in some form or other it is there. For faith in a Power greater than ourselves, and miraculous demonstrations of that power in human lives, are facts as old as man himself. We finally saw that faith in some kind of God was a part of our make-up, just as much as the feeling we have for a friend.

Sometimes we had to search fearlessly, but He was there. He was as much a fact as we were. We found the Great Reality deep down within us. In the last analysis it is only there that He may be found. It was so with us.

Psalm 92. It is good to sing praise to you, Lord ***and to thank you for all your blessings**
To proclaim your love in the morning *** and your faithfulness every night**
For you let me delight in your world, Lord *** you make my heart sing with joy**

How great is your goodness, Lord *** how unfathomable your works**
It can't be seen by our eyes *** or grasped by our thinking**
But every secret is told *** every sin is forgiven**
Every good deed rewarded *** every wrong is redressed**
Though chaos rules on the surface *** in the depths of our souls, all is well**

And the wise will flourish like palm trees *** they grow like the cedars of Lebanon**
They are planted in the dark soil of God *** and their leaves keep turning to his light**
Even in old age they bear fruit *** they are green, and supple, and strong**
Living proof to the world *** that the Lord is at work and true to his promise**

A reading from the Good News according to Mark: And Jesus would say: "The Kingdom of God is like this: Suppose a farmer sows seed on the ground, and sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and matures, although the one who sowed it is unaware.

The earth produces the fruit on its own power: first a shoot, then a head, then the mature grain on the head. But when the grain ripens, all of a sudden (that farmer) sends for the sickle, because it's harvest time."

And he would say: "To what should we compare the Kingdom of God, or what parable should we use to describe it? Consider the mustard seed: When it is sown on the ground, though it is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth, yet when it is sown, it comes up, and becomes the biggest of all the garden plants and produces branches, so that the birds of the sky can come and nest in its shade."

And with the help of many such stories he would speak his message to them according to their ability to comprehend. Yet he would not say anything to them except by way of stories, but would spell everything out in private to his own disciples.

Sermon: A while back, I came across a story that caught my attention. It's about two alcoholics - who each went to their own AA meeting. And the story says that when Charley went to his meeting:

- He frowned when a member read "How It Works,"
- because the guy reading it stumbled and mispronounced some of the big words.
- And he felt angry when another member stood up and identified himself *not only as an alcoholic but also as a recovering drug addict.*
- *That's not allowed in here* – he mumbled under his breath!
- And then he found himself growing *restless, irritable and discontented*, twisting and turning in his chair, when some newcomer got up and spoke for what seemed to him like *way too long a time*.

Charley left there saying: "That was a lousy meeting. I should have stayed home."

And another man named Tom went to **his** meeting that same night.

And the story goes on to say:

- That when he listened to "*How It Works*" being read – he identified and felt a real bond with all the people in that room.
- And when some new member got-up and shared her story, his eyes started to moisten and he choked-up inside.
- He felt grateful to be there–
- And after the clean up and a little socializing, Tom's thoughts were:
- "*Thank you, God, for giving me another chance at my life.*"
- And the point of this story, **of course**, is that **both of these men attended the very same meeting**. And each one found exactly what he came looking for.

I like stories like these 'cause they have a way of driving home the kind of **spiritual lessons** we each need to learn. And they do it simply – *by telling us a story*.

- Stories have a way of by-passing our logical *minds* and waking us up *at some much deeper level* –
It's a level that's always falling back to sleep.

The Big Book says: "*We found **the Great Reality** deep down within us.*"

And if we can just stay awake, then *every day* we're given a chance to experience that Reality in our hearts. The Big Book concludes:

"In the end its really only there that God is to be found."

Adding: *"It's just that way with us alcoholics and addicts."*

Now, Jesus wasn't an alcoholic –but he really knows how to reach people *and he knew how to wake them up*. He did it *primarily* by telling them stories.

A couple of thousand years have gone by now and his stories are still being told *because their message still speaks to us*. His stories still have a way of breaking through to our hearts *and waking us up to the Presence of the Great Reality within*.

Now if we'll listen closely, many of Jesus' stories have a common theme.

Many of them start off with him saying: *"The Kingdom of God is like this" –*

or "The Kingdom of God is like that."

Maybe we've heard that phrase so often that it's lost **the real shock value** Jesus intended.

Maybe instead of waking us up, the phrase now puts us to sleep.

Here comes another story about a kingdom that doesn't relate much to me or speak about the world I'm living in.

Now it's true that political kingdoms are in pretty short supply today; but back when Jesus was telling his stories – **they had kings and they had Roman emperors too**.

And these guys **were very real** *and your life was shaped by them cause: they were the ones who were: large & in charge*.

If you tried challenging their kingdoms – then you probably weren't gonna be long for this world. **Jesus found that out – the hard way**. He challenged the powerful kingdoms of his day – He went up against the political ones -and up against the religious ones too. He paid for that *with his life. You don't mess with the Man!*

But throughout his ministry, *over and over*, Jesus invited people to **break free from all the kingdoms that had them trapped too**. He invited them to imagine what their own life would be **like if the God and Father he knew was truly their king** as well –And Jesus meant **King in this world** and not in some far off world that was yet to come.

So Jesus would tell them *story after story* of what a life like that would look like – *and maybe more importantly, what a life like that would feel like deep inside*.

In one story, he said *it would feel like you were a beggar* - and one day, this king throws a big party and when all his rich & powerful friends say they're *too busy and too wrapped up in themselves to come*, then all of a sudden, out of the blue; **he invites you!** – And he asks you come into his house – and to bring along all of your friends with you – **come and join him in a feast!**

Printed on the invitation it says: **The first will be last - and the last will be first.**

Now when that invitation arrives, imagine that you're really, really poor and you're living right on the edge. You haven't had a decent meal in a month and you've got no idea where your next one's gonna come from.

But now this invitation comes along – and it's addressed to you!

In your wildest dreams, you never considered yourself worthy enough to receive it – ***But here it is!***

“Come into my house. Come in and let me feed you the feast that I've prepared!”

- *That's what it feels like – Jesus says - to step inside the kingdom of God.*
- And if **any one** of Jesus' “kingdom stories” doesn't completely blow our minds right off of our shoulders, *then we haven't heard it right!*

Now, in thinking about *this kingdom business*, I tried to think about how it all might relate to us alcoholics and addicts.

And *what came to mind* was that little passage about “a kingdom” that's actually talked about in the Big Book. It's short and it's a little flowery, **but it makes the point.**

It reminds us that *we too have had our king* – a king that our addiction forced us to serve – His name was ***King Alcohol.***

(Now if you're a druggie – and you're living over in that neighboring kingdom – then maybe for you it was ***King Cocaine*** or maybe ***Meth the Merciless, or His Holiness, King HEROIN!***

You'll probably be able to relate to some of this “kingdom stuff,” just so long as you suffered hard and got “**royally screwed**” by the king just like the rest of us!

And so here's what the Big Book has to say about this king and about living in his kingdom.

It says: “*As we became subjects of this King, shivering denizens of his mad realm, the chilling vapor that is **loneliness** settled down. It thickened, ever becoming blacker. ... then would come **oblivion** and the awful awakening to face the hideous Four Horsemen – **Terror, Bewilderment, Frustration, Despair.**”*

Many of you probably remember what it was like *living in service* to that king.

- Remember how he treated you - *and your family too.*
- Remember how he took everything you had and then came back and wanted even more.
- Remember how you rebelled a few times – how you tried to escape – and how he tracked you down and brought you back like a slave in chains.
- **We can all relate to this “kingdom stuff” if we try!**

And so tonight, Jesus tells two little stories about *living life* in a very different kingdom – in what he calls, *the kingdom of God*. They're stories can maybe help wake us up as to how recovery works at the very **deepest levels inside.**

Jesus says: *being in God's kingdom* is sort of like being a farmer.

And this farmer takes some seed and he scatters it all around on the ground – **and then, Jesus says, take a really good look at what happens next:**

- The farmer doesn't have to do very much after that.
- God does for that farmer what he really has no power to do for himself!
- Jesus says: It's God who cracks open the hard shell of the seed.
- It's God who germinates and brings *to life* what's waiting there inside.
- It's God who shoots it up through the soil and guides it towards the light.
- And then, "**when its time,**" Jesus says, "it's God who makes it bear fruit."

It's only after all of this has happened that *the farmer finally wakes up* – and sees that **his crop has arrived. "It's harvest time!" he shouts.**

Now the question Jesus asks is this: Does the farmer take all the credit – or does he thank God for the mystery and for the beauty of his creation?

God is everything – and in everything – or God is nothing and in nothing. *What's our choice to be?*

And then Jesus tells another story. He says the kingdom is also *like a mustard seed*. And "Mustard Seed" was the name of the very first AA group I ever went to back in Detroit. It's a pretty popular name for 12-Step groups all around the country.

- See, the mustard seed isn't much to look at when it first starts off.
- It's a tiny, little seed – and even when it grows up – the truth is that it never becomes a huge tree – *but it only grows to the size of a very small bush.*
- And the farmers listening to this story are having their minds *blown away* by Jesus story!
- Why? Because Jesus is telling them that this scroungy looking little shrub is now the best-looking thing in that garden.
- He says: even the birds of the air, **they choose it** – They come and they make their home in it. They nest in its branches and that's where they sing their songs.

Why did Jesus choose the humble mustard seed for his story?

Why didn't he choose the great cedar of Lebanon –

The huge tree that we heard about in the psalm –

It's a really glorious tree that stands a hundred feet tall.

Why isn't the kingdom of God more like that?

Well, Jesus might answer that question, something like this:

Two people went to a meeting one night. And one went in feeling proud like a mighty cedar of Lebanon – and *he came away disappointed and feeling empty inside.*

He missed connecting with the Great Reality within.

And another man, he went in feeling humble, knowing that he needed what was there – knowing that he needed God to do for him what he had failed *over and over* to do for himself. And *he came away feeling whole and feeling blessed* – *He connected to the Great Reality that was within* – ***The kingdom of God is like that.***

Amen.