

Mark 1.14-20 The Divine Appointment
25 January 2009

This week we have seen images of hope and despair. Who could not have been deeply moved by the inauguration of President Obama? Such a sense of an historical moment for the whole world with the election of an African American president, and seeing an African American family at the centre of that celebration. The sense of a bright new era dawning as the US renews its political life.

On the other hand scenes of despair and hopelessness in Gaza as we see the suffering of the people there in what seems to be a hopeless situation; today the Church is praying for the people of Zimbabwe; inflation rate in the millions. Cholera, breakdown of the country because one man will not yield power.

In the middle of all that Jesus proclaims the Kingdom of God. Yet while there are images of hope, there too is despair; where there is peace there is also violence in the world. So what does it mean that the kingdom is here; how can that be when war still stalks the Earth?

Let's look at the passage and find out.

There are two things I want us to see from the Gospel today: first the inauguration of the Kingdom; second the implementation of the kingdom.

1. The Inauguration of the Kingdom

- a. Barak Obama inaugurated his administration with a stirring speech and so did Jesus; John the Baptist flew away on the helicopter, so to speak, and Jesus takes the stage: **The Time has come; the kingdom of God is near; repent and believe the gospel, or the good news.**
- b. Literally the *time has been fulfilled; the kingdom of God has approached; repent and believe the gospel*
- c. The time has been fulfilled. The word for time, here is kairós; refers to opportunity; something happening at the right time, the critical time. What Jesus is speaking of here is of a moment that has arrived, a time that has been fulfilled: preparations have been made, things were put into order and now, the time had come; the wait is over. For what?
- d. **The Kingdom of God**; literally *the kingdom of God has approached*. We have a sense of time and presence; it is now; it is here; there has been a movement towards. Like waiting for a 747 to land at the airport: its coming coming coming, here it is! Not just a good idea or a campaign promise, something real has been unleashed upon the world which Jesus calls the gospel, and which he defines as the **Kingdom of God**. And we are meant to understand that this involves God's righteous, rule over the earth.
- e. Jesus is referring here to Isaiah 52:
 - i. **How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring GOOD NEWS (the gospel) who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion "Your God reigns! (the Kingdom of God) Isaiah 52.7.**
- f. Jesus is proclaiming the gospel, the good news to Israel that her God reigns, that the Kingdom of God has drawn near: it is upon you. He is not teaching the general truth that God is King. He is teaching that the time has come, the time is now, for God to heal the world. That God was about to rule in history in a new and perfect way; to set wrongs right, to bring healing, to correct injustice, to establish peace.
- g. Barak Obama; Zimbabwe? Gaza?
- h. But Mark has a surprise for us. We will hear the phrase Kingdom of God in this Gospel many times. But its culmination will come with the crucifixion. As Jesus died on the cross above his head were written the words **The King of the Jews**. The Kingdom will not come raw power; its appearance will be marked by powerlessness; sealed not in a military or political victory but in blood shed on the cross. **"For the son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."** This is the key verse in Mark's Gospel.
 - i. How does this come into human lives?
 - j. Jesus says **15 repent and believe in the gospel**. This means a turning away and a turning towards.
 - k. The word for repent means to change our minds; to have a change of attitude. That is why we use the word in regard to sin for what we once

thought to be good and desirable we now, in the light of God's kingdom, reject as wrong.

- l. Repentance is more than just about sin it is about changing our minds: Jesus is inviting them and us to stop what we are doing, to repent, to turn away from what we have been doing and turn towards, to believe, turn ourselves towards what God is doing. To put our faith in what God is doing.
- m. It means that we stop and take a look at what is being brought to birth and we orient ourselves around this new reality.
- n. That is how the Kingdom of God intersects with human lives then and now;
- o. The kingdom is not brought into human lives by coercion or manipulation, but by invitation. An invitation heard and received. If that is true, then what are we waiting for?

2. The Implementation of the Kingdom

- a. One of the interesting issues around President Obama's administration had to do with the team he would surround himself with. It was interesting to see if he would indeed appoint his great rival Hilary Clinton to a post and it will be interesting to see this relationship unfold in the years ahead. But he needs a strong team to help him implement the policies the country needs.
- b. Jesus begins to gather his team to help implement the Kingdom agenda in the world. And his team is rather striking in its composition, not to mention his vetting procedure verse 16ff:
- c. **As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fisher men. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.**
- d. This is not the first approach of Jesus to these men; his call is built upon a history of association.
- e. First Jesus **invites them into relationship** with himself. That is he implements his kingdom programme in human lives. Jesus does not build an institution Jesus preaches; he heals; he invites; "Come, follow me".
- f. Here a couple of semi-literate fishermen. This surely will encourage us that we all have a role to play in the building of the Kingdom of God. It is not the work of **them**, it is the work of **us**, whoever we are.
- g. The second we notice he sets them on the work.: **I will make you fishers of men/people**. There is the work of implementing the kingdom of God. It's not an army taking control, nor is it a mass movement.
- h. It is one person at a time coming to that place of repentance and faith. How is that going to happen unless someone invites them? Someone has to tell them.
- i. The Kingdom of God grows one person at a time. It grows through relationship with Christ. Whenever anyone comes into relationship with Jesus the kingdom grows. That is how the values of the kingdom spread in the world. That is how God's rule extends, one person at a time, one heart at a time. When people come into relationship with Christ, when people repent and believe in the king. Imagine what would happen in Zimbabwe if Robert Mugabe repented and turned. We can pray.
- j. The value system of the kingdom of God says it is worth pursuing one person; **there is more joy in heaven for one lost soul who has found his way than for all ninety-nine who have never gone astray**;
- k. When I worked at McDonald's, I loved working at McDonald's, but I was not very good when they put me on grill. I could not co-ordinate things. McDonald's has found a way to completely standardize food production; you can order a Big Mac anywhere in the world and it will look and taste the same. Any Big Mac, anywhere. My problem was that I could never remember if the pickles should be on the top or the cheese slice and I kept getting it wrong. If you put the pickles where the cheese should be and the

cheese where the pickles should be it may taste the same, but it's not a Big Mac.

- l. The Kingdom of God is not like that. It is not implemented in massed, standardized production centrally. It is about one person at a time; one life at a time; one conversation at a time. The bottom line isn't everything. So people need to be told; they need also to be invited.
- m. St George's is a very active and relational parish. There is a lot of KINGDOM ministry and mission going on all over the place. I love the energy and diversity of ministry mission and relationship here; we are doing many different things.
- n. But if you are wondering about what you can be doing to help spread the Kingdom of God then hear Jesus' call: I will make you a fisher of people;
- o. We need to draw people into God's kingdom; into relationship with Jesus.
- p. Let us be deliberate about being Christ to one another and to the people we interact with; let us be deliberate about inviting people into relationship with Christ; immediately I hear you saying "Whoa, not me!"
- q. But we can be Jesus to one another; we can incarnate Christ, make him real in who we are, in what we do, in what we say; in the relationships we have the acts of loving service we perform; inviting people into relationship with Christ often begins by inviting them into relationship;
- r. I saw a DVD last week at the theological college which was looking at new Church plants that are operating across Canada. These church plants take different forms. One theme that struck me from all was this emphasis on being Christ in relationship to others. Some meet in defunct churches, others borrow church space, others operate in very non-traditional spaces. But all of them in their various ways had to rely upon building networks of relationships to build their congregations, for without money, without institutional support, there is little else. one guy in particular, who came from a solid evangelical background but was leading a non-traditional church plant in a very deprived area with many drug addicted people said something I found compelling. He said that as he reached out to people and just incarnate Christ in relationship he was beginning to see people come into their own relationship with Christ and were beginning to make changes in their lives to please Christ.
- s. Relationship opens the door; that is how the kingdom is implemented.
- t. Let us always have our eyes and hearts open for those kingdom of God opportunities.

The Kingdom is Inaugurated by Christ and sealed in his blood shed on the cross; The Kingdom is implemented in human hearts and lives

- u. It is all about Christ. It is all about relationship with Christ. Bringing people into relationship with him; bringing him to those who do not know him yet to repentance and faith. Let that be the quality of all that we do and say. let Christ sanctify all that we say all that we do, all that we are; let it be your prayer and mine that we in our words and actions, in our very selves would do that kingdom work of fishing; and so extend God's reign on earth, one person at a time;