

“Where Do You Work”

Matthew 6:31-33

Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' [32] For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. [33] But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Matthew 13:3-8

"Listen! A sower went out to sow. [4] And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. [5] Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. [6] But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. [7] Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. [8] Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 13:11

"To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, 31

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; [32] it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." [33] He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." [44] "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

[45] "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; [46] on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

[47] "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; [48] when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. [49] So it will be at the end of the age.

Matthew 22 [2] "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. [3] He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. [4] Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' [5] But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, [6] while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. [7] The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. [8] Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not

worthy. [9] Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' [10] Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.



Ok – Let’s start with the basics – Christians work for the Kingdom of God, – right the “Basilea ton Theou”. We even work in the kingdom of God. The Kingdom is within us too. But when was the last time, any of you, thought about living in, striving for, being part of a kingdom?

We might serve the community, county, the country, or the commonwealth, the state or even the United States. We might work for a our family, a federation, or the nation. We have loyalties to provinces or dominions, to empires or monarchies, republics or principalities. We may recognize a Jurisdiction, a homeland, a society, a sovereign. There is a realm of possibilities.

But in 2003 when we speak of Kingdom, we generally do not mean the “Basilea ton Theou” (that’s the original Greek word) of the gospels, but we call to mind instead places like Bhutan, Tonga, or even the United Kingdom of Great Britain.

The last time in this pulpit I reminded you that we preachers are not only responsible for speaking to our embedded, familiar theology, that is reminding you what you already know about God, but also to present the deliberative, challenging theology that will help us grow deeper and more mature in faith.

So what are we to strive for? We are a church, now and maybe always, in the midst of transition, being empowered by God’s spirit to strive in a new way for what – if not kingdom, then what... the Reign, the turf, the Suzerainty, the heartland of God. Even Jesus had a hard time describing what he meant. He had to use similes and metaphors. We heard just a few of them this morning. The “Basilea” is like..... seeds sown everywhere, a mustard seed, yeast, a treasure, a pearl, a net.

Even Jesus’ word Basilea was a metaphor, for something deeper he was trying to explain. So what metaphor would we use today to describe the place we work? Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *Professor of Ethics and Theology* at Drew University replaces the Bible's eschatological goal, "the kingdom of God," with a new one, "the kin-dom of God," explaining that she rejects the word **kingdom** for two reasons. "First, it is obviously a sexist word that presumes that God is male. Second, the concept of kingdom in our world today is both hierarchal and elitist" "The word **kin-dom**, she explains, "makes it clear that

when the fullness of God becomes a day-to-day reality in the world at large, we will all be sisters and brothers--kin to each other" ¹.

What is implied by the notion that the kin-dom? Or for that matter rule, leadership, commonwealth, You get the idea. How do we describe that for which we strive?

First, the church, the "ecclesia" is not the "basilea". Striving for the "heartland of God" is not building the church. The church is designed to be the servant of the Reign of God. We are given a passion for that dominion to come "on earth as it is in heaven."

So how did Jesus try to describe it in these parables we read this morning. "A farmer went out to sow the seed." Did you catch that little word – out? The people who work under God's jurisdiction are Outgoing, not ingowing. The seed is not planted in a climate-controlled nursery, but scattered with reckless abandon in open fields, on pathways, and among the thorns of a real, and often, inhospitable world. So, first of all, working for the "basilea ton theou" means abandoning our "churchy" agenda and needs, for the sake of continually exploring the most innovative ways to go 'out' beyond ourselves in mission to incarnate the gospel to our culture and the world.

Put another way, the world is not responsible for finding us! It's our job to muster our resources and maximize our efforts to give this life away in loving service to those beyond ourselves. We find our life when we take the needs of skeptical, areligious, even anti-church, people more seriously than our own. Theologian Emil Brunner is famous for his line, "the church exists by mission as fire exists by burning." To paraphrase Jesus, if we seek to save the status quo, we will lose life. The first measure of our success, in preaching, in program, indeed in all our ministry, is its outreach potential.

So what else can we gather from Jesus' metaphors. I think we can safely say that God's reign is extravagantly generous and overwhelmingly inclusive. The sower is a spend thrift with the seed. The tiny mustard seed, outdoes itself providing shelter for all kinds of birds. The net is full to overflowing, the merchant sells all he has, the king invites every street person to the wedding banquet. These are stories of abundance, or excess, of lavish inclusion.

Harvard theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the first century Jesus movement, Matthew's church, redefined "basilea" to mean wholeness instead of correctness. ⁱⁱ The "basilea" of Jesus meant a radical change of social order, taboos, insides and outsides of culture.

We have chosen to live together in our covenant of welcome.

"We welcome, respect, support, and lovingly encourage people of every race, ethnicity, creed, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, and physical and mental ability to join us on our journey of faith."

American multiculturalism claimed "tolerance" – word that has passed its sell-by-date because it can only mean, at best, a gift offered by the powerful to the powerless. The Basilea that we work for, has a new ethos, one based on acceptance, even support and encouragement.

Sarah York . in her book, *Pilgrim Heart*, ⁱⁱⁱ writes "We meet our familiar self in the unfamiliar," "We bring our humanity into that space of strangeness where darkness sometimes gives us the power to see." The spiritual journey also involves a pilgrimage toward *communitas*, "what happens when a whole group of people cross a threshold and together enter liminal time and space. . . place of 'holy insecurity' where creativity and birth are possible.

. . . In *communitas*, there are no social roles, status, or hierarchical structures. Everyone is equal. Even more significant, everyone feels what it is to be equal, and feels the potential for who we can be as a human family."

communitas is not the same as community. *Communitas* is a process where no-one is marginalized, because everyone is on the margin. It is a transitory period of transformation, which enables societies to return to their way of living in dramatically new ways. Who the people are is not what is important here – any group of people can form *communitas*. What is important is that the focus is on the action of this group; they cross a threshold together.

They work together in the Kin-dom of God

Those striving for God's reign, invest. I don't mean saving, like having an investment strategy, that hedges the risks of fraud, insider trading, and the markets ups and downs. Jesus says you sell all your stock to buy one pearl, or one field. Put your yeast into the dough and watch it grow. Our work for the "basilea ton theou" is more risky even than the current stock market. Security and comfort are not the goals; We aim to push the boundaries, live through conflict, and even grief, because sometimes an investment in a program, or a person will not pay off. God's dominion is not "fail-safe" but a place where it is "safe-to-fail".

This week, we remembered the 40th anniversary of Dr. King's famous, world-changing speech, "I have a dream". And another modern Christian martyr, Dom

Helder Camara, former Archbishop from Brazil, said, "When we dream alone, it remains only a dream. When we dream together, it is not just a dream, it is the beginning of reality."

Beloved, Remember Where we work.

We work together for the kin-dom of God. We seek above all else to be life bearing messengers of the love of God to those beyond our walls. We desire to learn what they crave to feed their souls, to hear what their spirits long for, to provide what their bodies need.

We work together in a covenanted "communitas", placing ourselves outside our comfort zone to work deliberately for justice. We will not allow ourselves consciously or unconsciously to extend sexism even if we have to use language that is unfamiliar and awkward; we will not allow ourselves to exclude the differently abled even if it costs us lots of money; we will actively seek out those who are underrepresented in our communitas, either by race, or by sexual orientation, or by class because we need them to become our truer selves.

We work together risking all to we may find abundant life. We refuse to play it safe lest we miss a miracle of God's call. We willingly invest all we have for just a chance to realize the dream of heaven.

Because God's Kin-dom is like that.

ⁱ This is Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz's replacement for the Bible's "kingdom of God" in her article, "Solidarity: Love of Neighbor in the 1980s," in **Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside**, edited by Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 31-40, 303-305

ⁱⁱ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ***In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*** (New York: Crossroads 1986), p. 113

ⁱⁱⁱ Sarah York ;***Pilgrim Heart: The Inner Journey Home*** (Jossey-Bass; 2001)