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### **An Idle Tale? (Luke 24.1-12)**

*Easter Day*

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We come to the final act of the great drama, the unveiling of its meaning and inner logic. ‘He is not here, but has risen’.

All Easter we’ve been grappling (certainly I have) with Luke’s insistence that all this is about the coming of the kingdom of God. Earlier in the gospel, Jesus had been asked by the Pharisees ‘when the kingdom of God was coming’. He’d answered: ‘The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, “Look, here it is!” or “There it is!” For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you’. And yet immediately he’d gone on to tell his disciples that its fulfilment was yet to be realised, and that before the kingdom comes, ‘the Son of Man must endure much suffering and be rejected by this generation’ (Luke 17.25).

So Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom seems to pull in two directions. On the one hand, he says the kingdom is already here, already in our midst – if only we have eyes to see. On the other, it’s as if his suffering, death and resurrection are necessary for its coming ... in other words, it’s not already here and in our midst, or at least not fully. And this same tension runs, as we’ve seen, through the Passion narrative itself. On Thursday, Jesus speaks of anticipating coming into God’s kingdom through what’s to befall; but on Friday, he acts as if he’s already there. By Sunday, well – he’s just left the scene altogether.

What are we to make of all this? In the first instance, I think it helps to unpack what we mean by this notion of ‘the kingdom’ – a phrase many of us find jarring. I recently heard that in a certain indigenous language the word ‘bay’ (as in Bateman’s Bay, the Bay of Biscay) is not a noun, as it is in English, but a verb. In English, we think of a bay as a thing, an observable entity – there it is, that’s Bateman’s Bay. But in a language where the word for ‘bay’ is a verb, then what’s named is not so much a

fixed geographical location, as a vast set of interrelated existences and actions that constitute the being of bay and give rise to its unfolding life.

And I wonder if the 'kingdom of God' is best conceived in just this kind of way – not as a noun, a fixed, observable entity ('Look here it is! There it is!'), but an unfolding dynamic of existence, action and relation. So when Jesus speaks of the coming of the kingdom of God, he's not talking about the arrival from 'heaven' of a rival system or regime. He's talking about the realisation of particular possibilities for being inherent in the life of the world.

And if this is right, I think it helps resolve the tension we've identified. On the one hand, these possibilities for being are and have always been among us. God is eternally God – pouring out love, calling us into relation. The invitation to live from this vital, compassionate goodness is ever-present. Some may, in fact, stumble into it or discover themselves there unexpectedly, like someone discovering a treasure buried in a field or like a merchant finding a pearl of great price (Matthew 13.44-45).

And yet, as these images from Matthew's gospel suggest, there's something hidden about the kingdom. It's not readily perceptible on the surface of things. What's more, its possibilities for being run deeply counter to the fearful, competitive and threatened dynamics that form most of us from childhood and comprise much of the world's life. And because this is so, it's always difficult to learn how to be this way, and dangerous to do so. For if you do, you may find yourself quickly at odds with way of the world – as Jesus did.

So we arrive at the point of tension – or maybe it's a paradox. The kingdom of God is already here among us, available, discoverable. **And** it awaits realisation in human experience and culture; its potential is not yet fulfilled. This is the sense in which we may understand Jesus' work and witness as *bringing* the kingdom, enabling these possibilities for being in and of God to be realised more fully 'on earth as it is in heaven'.

Today, of all days, we're given a glimpse of what this means. For the empty tomb reveals that a human being may indeed be wholly sourced in God's endlessly

giving life. Which is why the two men in dazzling clothes ask the women who've come to anoint Jesus' body, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead?' His resurrection is the ground of our faith that we too may be indefeasibly joined to the love and life of God. It's a faith that gives us courage to undergo the death of our defended and frightened selves; it releases us to live, here and now, with the 'glorious liberty of the children of God'. In this way, the kingdom of God, that particular pattern of action and relation, is made real among us and begins to transform the possibilities of the world.

A difficulty is, of course, that many of us find the testimony of bodily resurrection difficult to swallow. What do you mean 'he is not here, but has risen'? As for the first disciples, these words may seem to us 'an idle tale' and we struggle to believe. But the good news is that, as for the first disciples, we're not asked blindly to accept them. Instead, we're invited simply to keep company with those who sense there's something of God to be known here; we're called to be open-hearted, open-minded, attentive to encounter. Resurrection faith is not being confident to assert a doctrine, it's more like a process, in which over time we recognise that we're somehow, mysteriously, being drawn into a living relationship. We find that Jesus is somehow, subtly present or real for us, effecting transformation, bringing the kingdom. It may sound like an 'idle tale'. But in the end it's truth is tested by the life faith enables in and through us. So then, Maranatha – come, Lord Jesus.