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The Kingdom Among Us (Luke 22.66 – 23.49)

Good Friday

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All along Luke's Jesus has seemed confident there's a way through, a reality where love and justice reign, undetermined by the rulers of this world.

Last night, on the brink of his arrest, he's told his disciples, 'from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes' (22.18). This morning, it's as if he's already broken through: 'from now on', he tells the authorities who will dispose of life, 'the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God' (22.68). Last night, there was a moment of hesitancy, fear – a shrinking back. But by this morning, Jesus seems wholly to dwell in a reality beyond the machinations of the powerful, the mockery of the enforcers, the suggestibility of the crowd, the diffidence of sympathisers. He has passed over and is at home, already rooted in the energy and liberty of God.

It's as he'd earlier proclaimed to the Pharisees. The kingdom of God is not some future event or rival institution; 'it is not coming', Jesus says, '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'. It's a reality available to you – here and now. The signs of your indwelling it are courage, freedom, endurance, compassion and grace. And if this is how you've come live and the light by which you see, then the limits and illusions of the world we inhabit by default start showing up pretty clearly.

Take, for example, the casual violence and expedience of 'the system' as revealed in Pilate's apparently sincere, but ultimately half-hearted commitment, to discerning and acting with integrity; in Herod's shallow desire to be entertained; in the mercilessness of religious leaders and the soldiers' licensed brutality. From Jesus' point of view, little wonder he's unable to engage this system on the terms it offers. Though from the point of view of the system, it's little wonder Jesus' disruptive

presence, his liberating social practice and truthfulness, had to be done away with. The crack being caused in affairs must be smoothed over. And so Pilate and Herod will become mates – joined in common cause, reknitting the fabric of the status quo. And on the empire goes.

In Jesus' state of having passed over, what I'm calling this 'perspective of the kingdom' reveals also the real condition of Jerusalem – the holy city – whose people (of all people in the world) ought recognise God in their midst. Less than a week ago, it seemed they did – Jesus' entry had been acclaimed, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'. But now they've turned on him, shouting together, baying for his blood. Even the women who follow him to the site of crucifixion, 'beating their breasts and wailing for him', seem to Jesus to be going through the motions. Do they realise how unreal, how precarious is their situation? 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children'. Your city is faithless and forgetful of God, refusing to recognise 'the things that make for peace' (Luke 19.43). For here you are collectively rejecting yet another prophet, putting your trust in those who will conspire ultimately in your destruction. Therefore, he tells them, echoing the prophet Hosea, 'the days are surely coming when they will say, "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore"'. An end is coming to this hollowed out culture, even if you can't see it yet.

And, finally, the presence of one who dwells in God reveals the state of the human heart – for both good and ill. There are those who cannot recognise Jesus' truth or will not let him near; the criminal deriding him, the soldiers and religious leaders scoffing as he hangs on the cross. There are others who take refuge in the crowd, standing by, watching on, withholding judgement, withholding themselves. And finally there are some who do recognise real goodness when they see it. They are willing to confess it and undergo its consequences – though it's not who you'd first expect. It's the moral and spiritual outsiders, a dying criminal and a strangely sensitive Roman centurion.

As for Jesus himself – living and dying he is wholly handed over to God: ‘into your hands I commend my spirit’. His disciples are those called – we are those called – to follow him in this way. We are to be as and where he is – sourced in that eternal reality where love and justice reign, where illusion and destruction may be seen for what they are. But how do we find ourselves there? How do **we** discover the way?

It seems to me that the events of today – Good Friday – show us two things. First, the way is bodily and relational. Our passage into God, our citizenship of the kingdom, isn’t a matter of thinking or imagining ourselves there; it cannot be accomplished by a flight from history or the flesh. As it was for Jesus, our passage into God must be lived out in a particular time and place; particular fears faced, wounds integrated, hurts forgiven. There’s nothing abstract about it and it may be for us, as it was for him, a crucifying way.

Second, we are helped in our journey into God by his. The heart of the Easter mystery is that in Jesus giving himself consciously that we might be free, Jesus persisting in love despite everything, some power has been released, some forcefield of grace activated. This cannot be explained. It can only be encountered, experienced, as it was in the beginning, by hearts that are yearning, stuck, humbled and broken.

The invitation of today, then, is simply to draw near again to this forcefield of grace, to pray that we might be touched and changed by it, that with Jesus our brother, we may follow the necessary path; we may hear the call and answer.