

***Your Kingdom Come!***  
**An Address by Dr Noel C. Schultz**  
**Highfield Road Uniting Church, 2 July 2006**

‘The kingdom’ was one of the most frequently talked about subjects in Jesus’ ministry. In Matthew’s gospel you’ll find the ‘kingdom of heaven’ spoken about on more than 30 occasions. In Mark and Luke, Jesus is also constantly engaged in conversation about some aspect of the kingdom of God. But it is not just the frequency of this topic that impresses, it is the challenge, the dramatic turnabout inherent in the subject.

For us the words ‘May God’s kingdom’ can sound rather pious and bland, but when our Lord talked about the kingdom there was an element of revolution, a stirring call to change prevailing attitudes in society. During the period 50 B.C to 70 A.D. there was fevered expectation that God would establish a political, geographical kingdom in Israel. Consequently many, especially the religious zealots, were intensely disappointed that the one claiming to be the King, Messiah, did not restore the kingdom to Israel; accordingly they joined forces with the Roman occupiers who suspected that Jesus with his talk of a kingdom was plotting an insurrection against their brutal control. It was in this overheated and explosive atmosphere that Jesus spoke frequently about his kingdom. Not surprisingly, his execution on a cross was the predictable outcome.

You will recall that when I spoke in my first sermon on the Lord’s Prayer, I suggested that we say the words of address ‘Our Father in heaven’ with *confidence, even boldness*; when praying ‘Hallowed be God’s name’ I suggested that it should be with *a profound sense of our responsibility and commitment to advance God’s reputation in the world*. How, then, might we say the prayer ‘Your kingdom come’? I suggest we pray those words sitting on the edge of our seats, as it were, expecting something dramatic, even revolutionary to happen to us and to our world. This prayer needs to be spoken with *ardent longing, with nail-biting anticipation*.

A possible reason for not usually feeling that way when saying these words is because the concept, the kingdom of God, is rather enigmatic, some would say it is remote, nebulous, even a ‘pie in the sky’ sort of phrase.

So let's try to get a handle on the kingdom, let's try to unravel a little of what it meant then and what it might mean for us, so that we pray this petition with ardent longing.

A good place to begin is with the *verb tense* used – almost invariably it is the present. A few examples – John the baptizer burst on the scene with the announcement ‘Repent for the kingdom of heaven has drawn nigh’ (Matt. 3:2), a message repeated a few months later when Jesus began his ministry with the announcement, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe the gospel’ (Mark 1: 15). In other passages we hear again and again that the kingdom is near at hand. In today's gospel (Luke 17:20ff) when asked when the kingdom was going to come, Jesus replied, that the kingdom is not coming in such a way that one can assess its presence, not with external gestures, ‘for behold the kingdom is in your midst’. God's rule in the hearts of believers is a present reality. Elsewhere he claimed, ‘If I by the finger of God have cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come among you’ (Luke 11:20). Something has happened – the kingdom is a present reality.

In the Beatitudes the kingdom is currently experienced by ‘the poor in spirit’, and ‘those persecuted for righteousness sake’ (Matt. 5: 3, 10). I cannot recall a passage where Jesus speaks of the kingdom as a far off phenomenon. The petition ‘May your kingdom come’ does not imply that this is an event in the dim and distant future, far removed from our current situation in Melbourne on July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006. Thus with ardent longing - may your kingdom come to us and to others today!

Any attempt at defining the kingdom must begin with the one who is the king, or Lord, for he came proclaiming *the gospel of the kingdom*; he made the kingdom so real and appealing that his hearers would ardently desire it. Many of his parables were parables of the kingdom. Consider a couple examples: It is like a treasure which a lucky person finds buried in a field. He quickly sells his assets to purchase the field with its buried treasurer. It is like an exquisite pearl which a merchant discovers, and so highly does he value it that he sells all his other pearls in order to have it.

In other parables he emphasizes that the kingdom comes to us, without our efforts, without our actions. The parables of the seed sprouting and growing up while the gardener sleeps, of the tiny mustard seed that miraculously grows into a strong and vigorous bush, or a lump of leaven that permeates

all the dough and leavens the whole mixture, all speak of a miracle without our being aware of it, as God causes the kingdom to come.

To those who considered themselves the rightful heirs of the kingdom by virtue of their race, he emphasized that people from all races and social backgrounds, including those with profound disabilities, the marginalized, and the powerless, are invited to be guests at the king's banquet. There are keys for entering the kingdom, he said on another occasion, yet the kingdom is not a place or a territory. *It is God's rule within the hearts of those who repent and believe the good news of the kingdom.* If you want evidence of what happens when the kingdom comes, he said, how about these - the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life and the poor are hearing the good news of their deliverance.

What then might we mean when we pray, 'Your kingdom come'? *How then does the kingdom come?* It comes as you and I and countless thousands the world over experience the liberating power of the good news that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, that God is for us, not against us. It comes as we are enabled, through Spirit's prompting, to live at peace within ourselves, with our families, with our communities, and with our God. The kingdom comes to us and others when we are not deceived by the shallowness, selfishness and immorality so rampant in society, but instead let the Spirit of Christ produce in us in the fruits of faith.

Furthermore, the kingdom comes quietly, without fanfare as we collectively seek to relieve the suffering, comfort the distressed and encourage and support the lonely and the depressed. The kingdom comes to our children when ask that they be baptized, and as we nurture them in the way of Christ. The kingdom comes as we maintain services of prayer and worship, as we join together in celebrating the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The kingdom comes as we align ourselves with compassionate and caring people in demanding that refugees, asylum seekers and indigenous people in our land be enabled to participate in the bounty a humane and just society ought to provide.

Finally, in praying 'Your kingdom come' we need to give special thought also to those who not yet heard the good news of the kingdom, to whom the name Jesus Christ means nothing, or is merely an expression used in blasphemy. So it is a prayer that the kingdom, the rule of Christ, might come also into their hearts that they might discover the pearl of great price.

In praying this prayer we are mindful that others share this hope with us and are partners in this challenge. The Highfield Road congregation has a vital role too in striving to let the kingdom come. We work and pray in hope; we give and we witness in hope; we teach and we visit in hope; we persevere and we serve in hope.

Since the prayer 'Your kingdom come' is to the God who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above anything that we can ask or think, we can be sure that our prayer of ardent longing will not be in vain. We can in fact already now give thanks because the prayer 'Your kingdom come' is being heard and will continue to be answered.