

## group Bible Study – May 21, 2008

### Read Mark chapters 10-13

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We began our study of the book of Mark by listening to the very first words that Jesus preached: **“The kingdom of God is very near! Repent and believe the good news!”** One way or another, we've been hearing him say the same thing all along.

To understand the message and the life of Jesus, especially as we approach the texts about his death and resurrection, we need to know what we mean when we say “the kingdom of God.” Because this is the point of it all. Here are a few of Bob's thoughts about the kingdom of God what we're waiting for...

What do I mean when I say “kingdom of God”? I mean God's ultimate plan for this whole creation. The completed, fulfilled world that is coming (and is now here in an anticipatory way). Throughout all of the scriptures, our prophets and teachers, including Jesus, have cast a remarkable vision of the redeemed creation that God has promised: all that is now broken finally healed, no more war or pain or hatred or suffering, nature itself at peace, God's Spirit poured out on all flesh, God living in the world and the world living in God. The kingdom of God will be realized on earth when Christ returns to transform this place into the “new earth.” Our best way of understanding what this looks like is the transformation of Jesus Christ himself. He who lived the whole burden of the present world (to the point of death) was resurrected and physically transformed by God—an image of the kingdom come. So we can expect that we will also experience “a resurrection like his” (in the words of Saint Paul). God is coming to this place, to this earth, to our broken bodies and lives and communities. And when he comes, the world itself will be made whole. John envisions the end of the story in this way (Revelation 21):

I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God... and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

What does this all mean for us today, we who call ourselves the “people of God”? First, I think we need to recognize that as the Church we *cannot* ultimately create the kingdom on earth—the kind of transformation and redemption we are waiting for is totally outside of our power and control. We wait for God, who has promised it. But that doesn't mean we are inactive as we wait.

As our hearts and minds become more and more at home in that coming kingdom, we become increasingly dissatisfied with any world realities that do not resemble the attributes of the kingdom. We are restless in the face of injustice, hatred, sin, death, disease and all kinds of suffering. When we come to understand ourselves as citizens of the world-to-come, we are *intrinsically* compelled to give our lives to the mission of bringing God's love, justice and reconciliation to the earth. It's just who we are. We can't help ourselves. We simply *must* live the kingdom now, or else we're betraying our own hearts. Our hearts are at home in the kingdom alone.

Empowered by the Spirit of God at work in us, we will be the ones who joyfully proclaim the coming day of the Lord, and live our lives in a way that makes God's kingdom visible to the world even now. This is why we exist. Yay!