

**Sermon**

Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> Feb 2020. 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday before Lent.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 6:25-34

Title: Hide in the Silence in which God is Concealed

*May all I say and all we think be in harmony with you, God within, God beyond,  
God of all wisdom.*

*Amen.*

*Please be seated...*

Have you ever had someone tell you that you need to change the way you're feeling? You know the sort of comments I mean, things like "don't get so upset", or "you shouldn't get so frustrated", or "don't be so miserable". I do wonder about the helpfulness of such comments because, apart from the fact that it's entirely natural, and sometimes necessary, to feel these emotions, the basis for the comment seems to be the person's assumption that you'd have never thought of it for yourself. You know that you're upset, or frustrated, or miserable, and if you could stop being that way presumably you would. And, if that's not enough, when people say these things, they rarely, if ever, follow their oh-so-helpful suggestion with any practical advice as to how you can achieve this new improved state of being. Now, because I'm a worrier, the one that really exasperates me is when someone says "Oh, stop worrying" or "you worry too much"; as if, by pointing out what's already blindingly obvious to me, I'm suddenly going to realise the error of my ways and live the rest of my days in a state of tranquil peace of mind.

Well today, we hear Jesus telling us this very thing, 'do not worry about your life', he says, about 'what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?'<sup>1</sup> He goes on, 'can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?'<sup>2</sup> Well, of course, on one level we know he's right; we appear to have very little control over our physical existence, and worrying about it is fruitless and tiresome at best and, at worst, it can be emotionally debilitating and significantly restrict our lives. But, let's be honest, the mere fact that it's Jesus telling us not to worry doesn't immediately make

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 6:25 (NRSV)

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 6:27 (NRSV)

it any easier for us to accept or achieve, it's just someone else telling us what we already know. However, unlike others who may give us the same advice, Jesus doesn't leave it there, he goes where others fear to tread, and tells us how we can bring about this change, how we can move towards a different way of being.

'Strive...for the kingdom of God...'<sup>3</sup> he tells us. It appears that Jesus is saying that when we've found, and live within, the 'kingdom of God', we'll be able to live a life that is no longer blighted by worry, stress, and anxiety; these feelings will no longer overwhelm or consume us. But, what is 'the kingdom of God'?

This is a question that has been debated by theologians and scholars for as long as there have been theologians and scholars. Some think it's the place you go when you die, some an earthly utopia, and still others see it as a metaphor for a *state of consciousness*. *I guess, on one level as the saying goes, 'you pays your money and you takes your choice'*. *However, we do have some clues that can help us*. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells us that 'the kingdom of God is within you'<sup>4</sup> or 'among you'<sup>5</sup>, depending on your translation, and in Matthew's Gospel we hear Jesus saying that the 'the kingdom of heaven', which is the same concept, 'is at hand'<sup>6</sup>. 'Within you' or 'among you' suggests that it is here, and 'at hand' suggests that it is present in this moment, now. Therefore, according to Jesus' own teaching, the kingdom of God is here and now and, because we're already in it, it isn't something we have to attain, it's something we have to become conscious of. The Gospel of Thomas, found in a small desert cave near Nag Hammadi in 1945, has Jesus elaborating on

---

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 6:33 (NRSV)

<sup>4</sup> Luke 17:21 (KJV)

<sup>5</sup> Luke 17:21 (NRSV)

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 3:2 (KJV)

the saying found in Luke; here Jesus says ‘if your leaders say to you “Look! The Kingdom is in the sky!” then the birds will be there before you are. If they say that the Kingdom is in the sea, then the fish will be there before you are. Rather the Kingdom is within you and it is outside of you’.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the kingdom is to be found within and without, it is within us, and among us, and within all of creation.

The Franciscan priest Richard Rohr, tells us that the kingdom of God is ‘the eternal state of things’ which is ‘finally and forever true’; it is the place, he says, where we put aside ‘the small kingdoms we all create’, where we leave behind our ‘self-created kingdoms’ and ‘the tiny man-made boundaries’ of our own making<sup>8</sup>. So, the kingdom of God becomes an alternative reality, a divine reality that exists in the here and now, a reality that we may not ordinarily see but which we can access. A reality where we come to see God in all people, regardless of their economic background, their education, gender, colour, sexuality, age or physical ability; where we come to see God in all religions, recognising that all of the world’s great religions are culturally rooted expressions of a single, saving truth; and where we come to see God in all of creation recognising our interconnectedness and interdependence with all created things. The kingdom of God is the place where we surrender our egos and our need for power and control; the place of humility, where self-centredness, superficiality and materialism give way to reconciliation, concord and love. The place where the living God, as light, and presence, and unconditional love, pervades, and

---

<sup>7</sup> Gospel of Thomas, Saying 3a. From: Davies, S. (2002) *The Gospel of Thomas: Translated and Annotated* by Stevan Davies. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., p.3.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Rohr (2014) ‘What is the “Kingdom of God?”’. Center for Action and Contemplation, Podcast, Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

radiates from, all created things, and the peace of God dissolves the anxiety, worry, and conflict that blight our worldly life.

But how do we find it, how do we come to the realisation that we are already there, that this is it? Well, firstly, we have to acknowledge the significance of the grace of God in this process, we must not underestimate the importance of what Professor Elizabeth Johnson calls 'God's own self-communication'<sup>9</sup>. But there are things that we can do to move ourselves towards this deeper level of awareness, this awakening to the truth that is hidden in plain sight. The Trappist monk Thomas Merton gave us a clue when he said 'God is hidden within me. I find Him by hiding in the silence in which He is concealed'<sup>10</sup>. It is by engaging with God in silence, in the silence of contemplative prayer and practice, through Christian meditation, and by ever more fully embracing silence, simplicity, solitude, and stillness in our lives, that we can draw ever nearer to the Kingdom of God. Another practice is what the French Jesuit priest Father Jean-Pierre De Caussade referred to as 'the sacrament of the present moment', what today we may know as mindfulness. When we practice 'the sacrament of the present moment', we come to realise that the opposite of worry is not peace of mind or tranquillity, but the ability to purposefully pay attention, being in the here and now, the present moment, being fully aware of what we're doing without judging it or criticising it, and without wishing we were doing something else. Jean-Pierre De Caussade tells us that 'we must confine ourselves to the present moment without taking thought for the one before or the one to come'<sup>11</sup>. In the second letter

---

<sup>9</sup> Johnson, E. A. (2007) *Quest for The Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, p. 42.

<sup>10</sup> Merton, T. (1999) *The Intimate Merton: His Life from His Journals*. New York: HarperOne, p. 53.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Pierre De Caussade from: *The Sacrament of the Present Moment*.

to the Corinthians, we hear Paul saying 'now is the acceptable time...now is the day of salvation'<sup>12</sup>. This also seems to be what Jesus is telling us in the last verse of today's gospel reading...'do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today'<sup>13</sup>.

So, as we strive for the kingdom of God, we journey, to quote T. S. Eliot, to where 'the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time'<sup>14</sup>. We must set out on the journey, but we journey to where we already are; we journey to where God already is, within us and among us.

'Help us, Lord, to be rooted in you in every instant, by being moment by moment rooted in your divine will'<sup>15</sup>.

Amen.

---

<sup>12</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:2 (NRSV)

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 6:34 (NRSV)

<sup>14</sup> T.S. Eliot: From 'Four Quartets.

<sup>15</sup> Lubich, C. (2014) Here and Now: Meditations on Living in the Present. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Welwyn Garden City: New City, p. 42.