

August 7, 2022

“Thy Kingdom Come”

***What if... the Church is Always Trying to Come to Us
from the Future?***

11 Now faith is the assurance^[a] of things hoped for, the conviction^[b] of things not seen. ² Indeed, by faith^[c] our ancestors received approval. ³ By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.^[d]

¹³ All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, ¹⁴ for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better homeland, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

Luke 11: 1-13 *“Father,^[a] hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.^[b]*

I am coming out of COVID,
It first took my voicebox,
so I sounded like Barry White,

That was almost two weeks ago,
the fever is long gone, and I'm not COVID positive anymore,
and I couldn't give this virus to you if I tried,
but my ears feel full, and is head is buzzing,
and its hard to think.

So, my pondering this week has been with
plugged ears and slowed mind,
and I keep coming back to that healing story
where Jesus puts his fingers in the ears of a deaf man
and says, “Ephatha!” Be opened!

And thinking: *That’s what I need,*
and then wondering: *maybe that’s what we all need*
maybe that’s the whole deal
for me, for you, for this whole wonderful thing
that is the church.

I attended a wonderful lecture at Chautauqua,
by a Jewish theologian and rabbi named Shaul Magid,
who talked about how our religious communities are
rooted in our history,
our ancient stories and rituals and buildings,
give religion authority.

Think: How many businesses have opened
and closed on this street
in the last 100 years?

How many empires have come and gone in the last 2000?
and the church stands

We have survived a lot
learned a lot,
hurt some, helped a lot: universities began
by Christians, hospitals, too,
so much wonderful, transformative
work in the world.

But our long history can also be a weight.

The culture is always moving,
scientific breakthroughs are expanding our knowledge
and
technology is endlessly connecting us.
Identity and family life in evolving
in interesting and often liberating ways,
but also, in ways that are really challenging.

And in here, in our institutions,
things don't change as fast as out there.
because we carry this weight of history around us.

And there are people who get frustrated at how intransigent
we seem to be, how incremental our change,
how big our reach into laws and mores.

They would like to be part of a community that gives hope
and meaning and connection to ultimate reality, but
They see our minds as closed and our ears stopped, and
our theology irrelevant to their lives.
So, find their identity and belonging
and a sense of purpose in other places.

Meanwhile there have always been minds and hearts
on the inside of the church, the synagogue, the mosque,
people that know our intrinsic goodness and say:

What if there is something to this challenge?

What if God is in it?

What if it's the spirit of Christ

that is calling us to a better homeland.

a new creation?

When that makes us nervous we call those challenges
heresy, worldly,
Give me that old time religion, we might sing
and there is goodness in the old, too.

But listen to what this letter to Hebrews says about our ancestors:
who struggled with tremendous change:

*Faith is the assurance of things hoped for,
the conviction of things **not** seen?*

*If our ancestors had been thinking of the land that they had left
behind, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹
⁶But as it is, they desire a better homeland”*

What happens when we, as persons, as the church,
ask the the spirit of the Risen Christ
to some how put their fingers in our ears
and say *Ephatha, Be opened*
and to pray, as Jesus taught us:
Let your kingdom come.

What would we look like?
What would the church of the Risen Christ
be like?

I've spent time this summer learning from
Fr. Greg Boyle who has spent 30 years in L.A.
creating a community of faith and hope
for generational gang members
caught up in that violence to the body and spirit.

It may not appear so on the outside,
but there is a longing in these people,
these brothers and sister,
the same that is in you
and that was in our ancestors
for another homeland,
one, full of grace, that is calling to them

Those who respond to the invitation from Father Greg
to join Homeboy Industries
are given the dignity of work, and therapy and community,
given freedom to be vulnerable to their own deep pain
Rather than return to the land they left behind,
they lay down the weight of their history
for a better land.

And something happens.
In response to each, small, loving act ,
they begin to move, little by little,
from their small selves to their true selves.
it is, in every sense, the church,
the word made flesh.

Once, Father Boyle was to get an award
at a Catholic University in San Francisco.
but wasn't able to go to the ceremony,
so he invited one of the Homeboys
named Pasqual Pena
to accept it on his behalf.

Pasqual was overjoyed.

Oh, and you will also have to give an acceptance speech

Oh no, I'm not going to do that.

Just write out a little thing to say.

I'm too scared.

Pasqual gets there, its standing room only,

"...and accepting the award for Fr. Greg is Pasqual Pena..."

and he had this little piece of lined paper

and he was trembling,

and he shares his story, and ends by saying:

"Because Fr. Boyle at Homeboy industries believed in me,

I decided to believe in myself

and the best way I can think of paying him back

is by changing my life

and that's exactly what I did."

And now people are standing up and applauding and crying

and goes on for a long while.

and he says, to the person next to him.

Damn, they are sure clapping a lot for Fr. Greg.

No, they are clapping for you.

Na ah!

Yeah... they are clapping for you.

When we witness someone

claiming the new homeland,

and see and hear the transformation:

the goodness, the joy that brings,

we weep with relief

that the promises are true.

Ephatha, says Jesus,

be opened, he says to us

Your kingdom come, we say to God

The God of the unfolding, expanding universe believes
in us, in you, in us together.

The Creator of all time and space
all matter, dark and light
has poured Christ's spirit out into us,
and invites us to be the church
a community of boundless compassion
for all the earth

The church of the Risen Christ, the new homeland,
is always coming to us from the future,

We can turn back
to the land we've left behind.
or we can allow our smaller selves
to become our truer selves,
our narrow church for an even wider church,
our amazing history
for an even greater, cosmic story,
expansive in love and mercy,
where holiness is everywhere
even in us.

And who wouldn't want to be part of that!

Be open, says Jesus to us.
Your kingdom come, O God, we pray.

and the people say. Amen.