



**Saint Peter's
Sermon
'The Kingdom of God'
Romans 12.1-8**

'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.'

Jesus proclaimed the future kingdom of God himself to individuals.

But no man, or woman, is an island.

In line with the prophets, Jesus expected a political order of justice and peace.

However, Jesus did not expect this political destiny of human beings to come from the hands of a human government, from the hands of merely human, men and women.

In line with the prophets, Jesus expected this to come from the hand of God, and from God alone.

The Jewish, and the Christian hope, is hope in the future of the kingdom of God. It is hope for a future of every individual human being, in peaceful communion with every other human being.

A peace, now come into the world, in Jesus Christ, crucified, for the forgiveness of sins, and reconciliation to God in Christ.

In the words of William Shakespeare, in the Merchant of Venice,

'The quality of mercy is not strained
It drops like the gentle rain from heaven
upon the place beneath...
It becomes the throned monarch better than his crown.
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty
Wherein does sit the dread and fear of kings;

But mercy is above this sceptred sway.
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings;
It is an attribute of God himself;
And earthly power does then show like God's
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore,
Though justice be your plea, consider this:
That in the course of justice none of us
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy.
And that same prayer does teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy.'

Beyond the sceptred sway of every rule by human beings, sinful from their youth (Psalm 51), over other human beings, Jesus addressed his message of mercy, peace, and reconciliation, to each one of us, as individuals, in anticipation of a response from us.

Jesus' message, however, was never a matter of private concern. The Kingdom of God that Jesus came to proclaim, is a public event. It is for all people, in their personal relations to God. And an anticipation of all things, in relation to God, in the future of His Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God is the hope of the world. It is the hope of all people, whether they are aware of it or not. The human person, the human race, is defined by its openness to the future (Herder). The human person, the human race, is an anticipation of the future. We are, all of us, not yet.

In Jesus Christ, the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all. The future destiny of every person, and of the human race, has dawned in Him.

So that all who are in him, all who are related to him, in baptism and faith, already now live in the light of the future Kingdom of God, already now live in relation to God. The Peace of God already now rules in the heart of the Christian, in the worldwide fellowship of Christians, and in every act of Christian worship, in which Christ himself is Present, and with Him, the future Kingdom of God Himself. Not only *in* anticipation of the day when at Christ's return, the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. But also *as an anticipation* of the future fellowship of all human beings in the Kingdom of God. The Church that is a sign of the future destiny of the human race in the Kingdom of God.

Above and beyond the sceptred sway of the rule of individuals, sinful from their birth (Psalm 51) over one another, above and beyond the sceptred sway of the control of human beings, by other human beings, Jesus proclaimed the future of

the Kingdom of God. Jesus proclaimed the good news of the future of the individual human being, of *every* individual human being, who accepts his message, in peaceful communion, with every other individual human being. A future that will come, not from human beings, but from God, and from God alone, at Christ's return. A future that will come, not from the rule of human beings over one another, but by the rule of God himself, in replacement of every merely human form of government. By the replacement of every merely provisional order of human society in justice and peace, by the definitive peace and justice of God, in the Kingdom of God himself.

The Christian proclamation of the future of the Kingdom of God makes profoundly relative, every claim, of every political order, of every stripe, to the definitive establishment of peace and justice in the world. And it makes profoundly relative every final claim, of every political order, of every stripe, over the life of every individual human being.

By its very existence, the Christian church is a positive sign of the future destiny of the human race in the Kingdom of God. By that same existence, it is a negative sign, against the self-glorification of a political order that no longer recognises itself as a merely provisional order, over against the spiritual authority of the Church, the body of Christ, the mystical, spiritual reality, of Jesus Christ himself, in his risen, glorified, ascended life, to reign, with the authority of God himself, in and over the worldwide Christian Church.

Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God *to come*, thereby exposing every present, to the light of the future. Not in the ongoing political order of the world, not least of a society, alienated from God, from itself, and from nature; not in the false hope, the false promise, of this worldly salvation, that are there in modern western society today, to woo away a people, from the true Messiah, but in Jesus Christ, the true Messiah, and in the worldwide Christian Church, there is an anticipation, and a participation, in future of the Kingdom of God already now. And the truth, about God, and man, of the individual human being, of every individual human being. In fulfilment of the created identity, dignity, and destiny of all human beings, and of a human race, created in the image of God.

Deep within the heart of the individual Christian, in the worldwide, human fellowship of the Christian Church, and in every local celebration of Christian worship, already now there is present, if only in a partial way, by way of an anticipation, that replacement of every merely human rule, of the individual human being, sinful from their birth, over all other human beings, that is the hope of the world. There is already now, if only in a partial way, a life for the individual human being, in peaceful communion with every other human being, on the basis of the peaceful communion of every human being, with God

himself, in Jesus Christ, beyond the sceptred sway of human beings, sinful from their birth, in their manipulation of meaning, the basis of all human power, for their own sake, the universal, human desire, for control over others, by the rule of the elite few, over all other human beings.

For all of these reasons, Jesus did not call others to political action, as a way of furthering the arrival of God's Kingdom. Only God's Kingdom will bring the realisation of the human political destiny – of a life in peaceful communion with all other people. It cannot be furthered, but can only be distorted, by any attempt to attain to it by direct political action. Such action is inevitably delusive. Jesus himself, was not a zealot.

Above and beyond the spectred sway of human beings, as high as the heavens are above the earth, the gentle, worldwide, rule, of Christ himself, has dawned upon the world. The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all.

In Jesus Christ – in the Kingdom of God:

‘The quality of mercy, is not strained
It drops like the gentle rain from heaven
upon the place beneath...
[God's] mercy is above this sceptred sway.’

Jesus came proclaiming the kingdom of God, calling individuals everywhere, to repent and believe in the good news, beyond the world of the sceptred sway.

The kingdom of God alone is the basis of the Jewish, and the Christian hope, of a world of individuals, in peaceful communion with all other individuals. Of peace on earth. Of good will to all people.

The Kingdom of God, when it comes a final time, will come, as it did before, not from human beings, but from God.

And from the hand of God alone.

It is the Kingdom of God, not of man.

It will bring about revolution and change far beyond anything that human beings can imagine, change far beyond the progressive labor of merely human beings.

Jesus is the Christ, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

It is not yet the day when he has finally replaced the ongoing human political power structures of this world, with the rule of God himself, and in a universal way. It is not yet the day of the kingdom of God, the definitive establishment of justice and peace, throughout the entire human race.

But already now the day has dawned.

Already now it has come, into the hearts and minds of all who, upon hearing the good news of salvation, repent and believe in the good news of God.

Already now it has come, in the liturgical life of the worldwide Christian church. By the presence of Christ himself at every celebration of the Eucharist.

Already now it has come, in the form of a sign, in the international fellowship of Christians, of the future human fellowship of all people in the kingdom of God.

‘The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has drawn near, repent and believe in the good news’, Jesus said.

‘Let anyone with ears listen!’