

### MAKING A PARADIGM SHIFT

--Undeniably, Jesus has a laser-like focus on the notion of the kingdom of God. In his teaching, he is forever proclaiming it and talking about it; and in his life and in his ministry among humankind, he is forever acting it out.

For the people, this kingdom is something that is expected to occur in the distinctly remote future, at the end of time. It is an expectation that, by Jesus' day, Israel has entertained since at least the time of the prophet Isaiah, more than 600 years before. It is imagined to be a time when God brings the human experiment to a climax, when the "bad guys" with their bad ways are overthrown and the "good guys" inherit the earth.

For Jesus, however, this expectation regarding the kingdom takes a decidedly new form. The belief of its futurity can still be heard in some of what he says, but the radical new edge that he introduces concerns the kingdom's now being suddenly present. It is not, declares Jesus, something that will have to be awaited for another six or seven centuries; instead, it is something that is already breaking into human awareness, already slipping into human history.

--Fresh from his experience in the wilderness, this is the urgent message in his first terse, provocative sermon: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe (this) good news" (Mk 1.15). The wait is over, he is announcing, and the kingdom is now immediately available. What is required of us is a fundamental change of mind, which is all that is necessary to unlock the doors to it.

The sharp command here that is translated simply as "repent" is derived from the Greek noun *metanoia*. We take "repentance" to mean remorse and guilt and shame for our former ways of living. And while arguably some of our past choices and deeds merit a certain amount of remorse and guilt and shame, that Greek noun actually points in a very different direction from merely these unpleasant feelings.

In fact, the word *metanoia* means literally "beyond the mind" (*meta* + *nous*), which suggests that repentance basically is not about feelings at all. Rather, it involves the putting aside and passing away of a old mindset that isn't exactly working and, in its place, the embracing and the flourishing of a new mindset that will.

In Jesus' summons for people to "repent," then, he is challenging them to dispute and forever to abandon an established errant and hurtful way of thinking and instead to open themselves to a new, healthier, holier one. That represents the very good news and, if

successful, it results in a veritable paradigm shift. An entire antiquated worldview collapses, as another much more promising one emerges. And that changes absolutely everything.

Effectively, with the shifting of that human paradigm, the long-expected End, in fact, has just occurred, and the new beginning under God has already started to unfold.

--Some hypothetical scoffer among us might quickly counter all this warm-and-fuzzy stuff. "So the kingdom is already among us, is it?," said-scoffer might say. "And just where is this kingdom to be found? Look at the world in which we live! Where do you see evidence of the kingdom of God here?!"

These are some hard-nosed questions, just the sort of questions that we could predict coming from a world like ours.

Do you hear that voice protesting?

- The world is a place where there simply is not enough to go around for everyone. Scarcity is the norm, and there are too many people who need too much. In best providing for ourselves and our families, it is important for us to get all that we can, selfishly to hoard it for ourselves, and protectively to hide it away from others who would take it.

That may strike as us being accurate enough, but, while this may be the world that some regularly experience, it is not the only world that is possible.

Surely we can do better. How? In the light of the most current psychological research, it turns out that Paul's assertion is empirically true: "Do not be conformed to this world of fear and worry, to the world as it commonly is thought to be, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that another world might have space to come into being."

Change the thinking, you see, and we change the individual.

Do you hear that voice persisting?

- But the world respects only one thing, and that's power--raw, tough, unmerciful power. If we do not possess and exercise that sort of authority, others will walk all over us. We must do all that we can, therefore, to enhance our power, our position, our advantage over others. It's our only security.

In a world of too many bullies whose voices tend to drown out the rest of ours, this, too,

may seem like the prevailing nature of the world, but, while this may be the one that many know over the course of an entire lifetime, it is not the only world that is available to us.

How is that? You have already heard the fabulous insight: “Do not be conformed to this dog-eat-dog world, to the mean-spirited and intolerant world that it frequently is seen to be, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that another and better world might emerge.”

Change the thinking, you see, and we change the community.

--The bottom line is this: The mindset that we adopt directly contributes to the character, the quality, and the direction of the world that we know. We have an exceedingly important role to play in the creation of our own reality. The world at large that we inhabit is nothing less than the sum total of the individual worldviews within it. Change the thinking to a new paradigm, and we change the world.

This implies that God is in no manner either delaying or withholding the coming of the kingdom. Out of love for us, God wants nothing more than to give it to us. The only thing which continues to keep it at a distance is the refusal of people to surrender and sacrifice some well-worn, age-old mindset which keeps us stuck in the world of narrow self-interest and self-defeating power-madness. Simply put, until that world goes, the kingdom cannot come. Only we stand in its way.

Before we destroy ourselves with our hatreds, and our toxins, and our new-found nuclear playthings, it's time for the renewal of our thinking, in order that the kingdom of peace and prosperity for all, as promised, can come. If we will graduate beyond the present small-mindedness, something much greater will take its place (remember: *metanoia*, “beyond the mind”--i.e., beyond the present, prevalent mindset).

As Jesus insists, the kingdom of God is forever just outside the door, knocking; it has been knocking and waiting for a very long time. If the new world of God fails to break forth in our personal lives, in our families, in our communities, in our churches, it is only because we remain so doggedly conformed and committed to preserving the old world.

It would be the height of irony, wouldn't it, to learn that those “bad guys” with their bad ways who so-need overthrown may be no one but us?

Now, there's a thought!