

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 30, 2023

What kind of a world do we want?

Maybe you've never thought about that question before. But I have. I have been thinking about it a lot following the recent killings here and there. Maybe many people don't think about what kind of world they want because the answer seems so obvious to them. I used to think that was the case. Maybe I was wrong or just overly hopeful. Now, I don't mean that I thought most everyone was in total agreement when it came to these sorts of things. That's not it at all. But I did at least feel that most people were working toward the same end, toward the same goal, toward creating the same kind of society, the same kind of world.

And so, I believed that the disagreements I saw and heard between people were simply about the means to achieving those goals, disagreements about the ways that the world would best come about. As I get older, I'm not so sure that people even agree on the kind of world they want to live in, not so sure people even agree on what that world would look like. And so, much discord, anger, and anxiety often are the result.

“The kingdom of heaven is like”

Jesus, as you know, uses these words often to illuminate things for his disciples in an attempt to clarify for them what his teachings are all about. He continually comes up with different ways of describing something that is (admittedly) pretty difficult to describe. And so, he uses different ways and words and similes to paint a clearer picture for his listeners of something that is often cloudy and difficult to imagine let alone understand.

And from Jesus' teaching about the “kingdom” in today's Gospel passage from St. Matthew and elsewhere in the Scripture, one thing seems pretty

clear: The kingdom Jesus is talking about is a world much different from the one most people are experiencing in their day-to-day lives. The kingdom Jesus wants to usher in, and wants us to help make manifest, is one in which people forgive one another continually, over and over and over again. It's a kingdom in which people show mercy toward one another, and not judgment. It's a kingdom in which people show generosity. Show compassion. Show justice. Show kindness. Show patience. Show love. And not in small amounts, but all the time to everyone and in every situation. In this kingdom the lamb even lies down with the lion. The child plays with a cobra. It's just that radical. That incredible. That beautiful.

What kind of world do WE want?

In today's Gospel passage one analogy stands out above all others (in my estimation). It began today's passage and begins like this,

“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure”

The use of the word “treasure” would have gotten the attention of his listeners. In a time when most people had very little, the idea of having much, of having a lot more than one needs, would have been almost like a mirage to them, something one could dream about but never achieve in ten lifetimes. Life was hard. Not once in a while, but every day as most people just scraped by, hoping to make enough, or grow enough, or raise enough to put a little food on the table and a roof over their heads. And a “treasure” certainly sounded like something everyone desired, everyone longed for, everyone dreamt about.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure”

Is that what the kingdom is for us? Is it a treasure? Is it something we would do just about anything to find, to experience, to bring about?

Honestly, I'm not so sure. In this sort of kingdom, this sort of world, we would have to give much more than we are currently giving (and not just expect other people to be generous with US). And in this sort of kingdom we would have to forgive people we really don't want to forgive (and not just expect others to forgive US when we mess up). In this sort of kingdom we would have to be fair and honest and just in all things (and not just expect others to be fair with US). And in this sort of kingdom we would have to do what we could to alleviate the sufferings of others (and not just expect others to comfort US). Put simply, in this sort of kingdom we would need to love all kinds of people and in all sorts of situations and without any conditions (and not just expect others to shower US with love).

Is that the world we want? Is that the kingdom in which we want to be a loyal subject? Is that our "perfect" world, the one God created to be and Jesus died to help bring about?

Desiring that sort of world and being willing to work to make it more of a reality, may be one of the most difficult things we are called to do in faith. It's not always easy to truly want what God wants. And make no mistake about it. Helping bring about that world is what true faithfulness is all about. And that's not just for others to worry about.

It's our work too. So we've a job to do.