

Devotional Reflection, Thursday, November 21, 2024
Proper 28, the week of the twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D.

The Question is “Where?” Not “When?”

Key phrases for reflection from today’s Gospel reading:

20 Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; 21 nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.'

You will find the full text of today’s Gospel reading at the end of this reflection.

Daily Office Lectionary readings (BCP, 993)

AM Psalm 105:1-22; PM Psalm 105:23-45

Malachi 2:1-16 ; James 4:13-5:6;; Luke 17:20-37

Today we celebrate the Feast of Mechthilde of Hackeborn and Gertrude the Great..
(See below.)

David’s Reflections

The poet, Theodore Roethke wrote:
The world is where we fling it.
Lift me, long dream.
I'm leaving where I am for other loves
Than what I see. *

Roethke's phrase, "I'm leaving where I am for other loves than what I see," came to mind when reading this Gospel passage. Both Jesus and the Pharisees had a sense that we are heading toward another world, one we cannot see. The Pharisees believed that the new world of God's future kingdom would be announced by observable signs. Their question to Jesus may well have been a serious one, addressed to him as a teacher in the hope that he would shed light on possible harbingers of the future world.

Jesus' response must have shocked them. "The kingdom of God comes not with things that can be observed." The coming of God's kingdom would be as sudden and unpredictable as a lightening flash. He likened it to the flood in Noah's day that came suddenly upon the world. He likened it to the breaking in of a burglar, unpredictable and sudden. Jesus reframed their question from "when" to "where." The issue was not when the Kingdom would dawn and end the age but rather where was the kingly rule of God expressing itself in the present moment. "The kingdom of God is among you" (v. 20).

We pray each week, "Your kingdom come." In synch with Jesus' love for what could not be seen, we pray for the end. What a sobering thought. This world of existence, as we know it, shall end. Jesus will return to complete God's work of salvation and purify and complete God's new creation. This order of reality--political, economic, cultural--will bend to God's ultimate will give way to God's new creation.

The fulfilling of God's kingly rule will be completely unexpected. Contrary to what some claim in book, movie, and sermon, that fulfillment cannot be anticipated on the basis of observable signs. Jesus cautions against the demagogues who tell us to "look here" or "look there" as if they know the warning signs of the impending end. These sorts of people inevitable arise, speaking to our fears, to our inability to control the future, to our desire to know. They offer us the comfort of a predictable future, which flies in the face of Jesus' claims of unpredictability.

What will that fulfillment be like? Again contrary to popular expectation, the world will not "end" with a cataclysmic destruction. Jesus' ministry of love, healing, and deliverance give us a hint. The fulfillment will be as was the inception in Jesus, a new creation of healing and deliverance and love. Christ's resurrection serves as harbinger and guarantee. To borrow a word from Roethke, the new creation will be flung into existence as a result.

Again, the question is not "when" but "where." Jesus says, 'The kingdom of God is within/among you.' The phrase can be taken either way. The "you" is plural, meaning "among you (all)." Jesus could have meant that the Kingdom is an inner reality within the human heart, rather than a predictable future event. But, the more

likely reading is "among you," meaning that Jesus' life and ministry embodies a nearer revelation of the Kingdom than its ultimate consummation.

If so, we have a striking instance of the saying, "The kingdom comes not with things to be observed." The kingdom was among them in Jesus; did they see it? Did they recognize it? No! The kingdom had come into their midst and they had not seen it. Why would they think that the final, complete revealing of God's kingly rule would be any more predictable than his coming in Jesus? So with us. The kingly rule of God is among us, unfolding all around us. Can we see it?

Jesus calls us to a life of diligent discipleship. It is not given us to predict the time of the end. Rather, it is given us to be faithful to Jesus and to avoid getting entangled in the values, goals, and pursuits of a world that has an ending. Only in that way can we be ready for the next manifestation of the kingdom and for its final coming. "Not where but when?" Otherwise, we are like people living in a building condemned for demolition who refuse to vacate. As Roethke put it:

"I'm leaving where I am for other loves
Than what I see."

* *Straw for the Fire: from the Notebooks of Theodore Roethke: 1943-1963*. Selected and arranged by David Wagoner (Doubleday, 1974), p. 48.

Collect of the Day, Proper 28, The twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen*. (BCP, 236)

Today we celebrate the Feast of Mechthilde of Hackeborn (died 19 Nov 1298 CE) and Gertrude the Great (ca 1302 CE), mystics.

<http://www.satucket.com/lectionary/Mechtilde&Gertrude.html>

Collect of the Feast of Mechthilde of Hackeborn and Gertrude the Great

Almighty God, who gave to your servants Mechthilde and Gertrude special gifts of grace to understand and teach the truth in Christ Jesus: Grant that by their teachings

we may know you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ your Son; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

A Collect for Guidance

O God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people; Grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP 100)

For the Parish

Almighty and everliving God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 817)

In the Order of Worship for Evening

Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our fathers, creator of the changes of day and night, giving rest to the weary, renewing the strength of those who are spent, bestowing upon us occasions of song in the evening. As you have protected us in the day that is past, so be with us in the coming night; keep us from every sin, every evil, and every fear; for you are our light and salvation, and the strength of our life. To you be glory for endless ages. *Amen.* (BCP, 113)

A Collect for Mission

O God of all the nations of the earth: Remember the multitudes who have been created in your image but have not known the redeeming work of our Savior Jesus Christ; and grant that, by the prayers and labors of your holy Church, they may be brought to know and worship you as you have been revealed in your Son; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 257)

Daily Office Gospel, Luke 17:20-37

20 Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; 21nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.' 22Then he said to the disciples, 'The days are coming

when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. 23They will say to you, "Look there!" or "Look here!" Do not go, do not set off in pursuit. 24For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day. 25But first he must endure much suffering and be rejected by this generation. 26Just as it was in the days of Noah, so too it will be in the days of the Son of Man. 27They were eating and drinking, and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed all of them.

Daily Prayer Offices in The Book of Common Prayer

Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, *Book of Common Prayer*

Noonday Prayer, p. 103, *Book of Common Prayer*

Order of Worship for Evening (Vespers), p. 109, *Book of Common Prayer*

Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, *Book of Common Prayer*

Compline (Night Prayer), Page 127, *Book of Common Prayer*

Daily Devotionals, page 136, *Book of Common Prayer*