

Men's Group Meeting

Thursday, October 15, 2015

Summary:

On Thursday, Bill Walsh, Associate Director of the Holy Family Retreat Center spoke to the group starting with a discussion from last Sunday's gospel from *Mark 10:17-30*, the story of the rich young man who asks Jesus what he must do to gain eternal life.

Bill presented Jesus' encounter with the young man in a different way than we normally think about, not about giving away our possessions but rather thinking about the fact that the young man was really asking how he can "get" to (and experience) the kingdom of God.

According to Bill, the phrase "The Kingdom of God" is a phrase that Jesus uses 68 times in scripture, almost always explaining that the Kingdom of God is at hand..it's here now! In Luke 17:20;

"Jesus replied, 'The coming of the Kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst.'"

Bill's point is that we need to take what Jesus said at face value; Seeing and experiencing the Kingdom of God is an attitude, a way to *see* Life around us. In the Kingdom, people feel connected with one another. God, through Jesus is saying that the more connected we feel. The better we know the fullness of the Kingdom.

Being connected with everyone goes against our nature, though. We can easily like to distinguish ourselves from others; In the case of the rich young man, his wealth sept him apart. It allowed him to choose with whom he would associate (the more well off people); it could have been a matter of arrogance (I have this status and he doesn't; It made him feel a sense of superiority and, even though he gave to the poor, he did it from a position of his own strength and resources, not from his sense of dependency on God. You could almost hear him saying, "I have enough to share with these poor people". As Bill pointed out, he (the rich young man) didn't feel that he **needed** the connection with the poor; he just needed to give to them.

Being Kingdom people, however, calls for something different. It means becoming connected to all. It requires that I give of myself, giving up the thing that creates the separation from others; allowing the walls we create around us to come down, to no longer be barriers to *being* with others. As a Kingdom person, I need to be inter-dependent.

As we live our lives, our separation from others creeps in subtly. It could be our job, our house, our education, our social circles; the small group we associate with to the exclusion of meeting others.

This need to differentiate ourselves was something even Jesus' disciples experienced. In Mark 9:33, Jesus tells the disciples that he is going to Jerusalem to be crucified and to die... profound and disturbing information, so you'd think. A short while later, Jesus sees the disciples arguing among themselves and he asks them, "What were you arguing about?". As we recall, they were arguing about who was going to be the greatest among them. Jesus, in frustration, tells them that they missed the point. The least among them will be greatest and the greatest least. To further make his point, he chooses a child from the crowd and tells the disciples that they must be like this child.

Bill went on to explain how significant that was. We often take this as a nice story about Jesus loving children. One reason for this is because, now, in our times and society, children are seen as precious. We often have our schedules, if not our lives, revolving around our children. In Jesus' time, this was different. The status of children was equivalent to the status of a slave; they had no standing, Men disregarded them; they had no "worth". What Jesus was really saying was that we need to be able to embrace those of the least status and become like them; connected with them; not separated from them in order to experience the fullness of the Kingdom here, right now. To make his point to the disciples, He picked someone on the opposite of the spectrum of what they had been arguing about; not the greatest,.. but the least. "If you welcome one of these...", you'll know what the Kingdom is about.

The question is, "Can you associate with someone of no status, someone you do not know, someone with whom you have no real things your share in common?"

All of us have a barrier of some kind that makes it hard to connect with a particular person, or a group of people. It makes us uncomfortable to be around them and very uncomfortable when and if we are asked to get into some sort of relationship with them. This greater challenge calls for us to push ourselves to connect with someone diametrically opposed to us but that's where the joy of the kingdom lies.

There's always a risk of rejection but if we take that risk, there is a joy and potentially a connectedness that allows us to become interdependent and experience the Kingdom God has for us..Right here, right now.

Making that effort to overcome our hesitancy to reach out beyond ourselves and look for that connectedness is difficult. Being a Christian is hard. It means being willing to get out of our comfort zone and risk something.

Bill related it to the parable of the treasure found buried in the field (sometimes referred to as a pearl of great price. Back in the time of Jesus, land was a special commodity and most of it was owned by a just the wealthy. This very land, however, was the same land that the Israelites buried their treasures in times of trouble, when they feared that they were going to be over run or led into captivity. Landowners hired laborers to work the fields.

Bill asked us to imagine ourselves as that labor who, in the course of his work in the soil of the landowner, found this great prize. As a poor worker, he reburied it. After his work, he went home, gathered everything he had, all he could get together from any source and went to buy the field from the landowner. He put everything he had on the line to be able to get the Pearl. As Bill said, this is what God is calling us to do, to reach out, to get out of our comfort zones and to make those connections which will bring us the Kingdom of God now

In Luke 6; 27 and beyond, Jesus says that we must "love our enemies", being willing to give all we have to those who mistreat us for ""If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them." (Luke 6:32). The thing God is asking here is for us to do is to do good to those who hurt us, to those with whom we have an instant dislike, with those that we separate ourselves from. In this case, "enemy" is not just those who wish us harm but anyone that we normally shy away from. If we can say, "I'm glad I'm not like that person", that's a place to start. As Bill said, God

is asking us to risk that much.. to “sell all we have” in terms of our comfort, our natural tendency to not engage with some people and put it on the line.. in the hope of becoming connected and experiencing the Kingdom of God right now. The question we need to ask ourselves is “Am I willing to take the risk to make that happen?”. We can’t pray for God’s Kingdom to come unless we let our own kingdom go.

For us, it can start simply.

Is there someone with whom you work that is hard for you to get along with? Reach out and take the risk.

Is there someone you see with whom you have had a hard time, a family member, a former friend, a person from somewhere in your life that, if you see them, you feel like avoiding contact? Reach out and take the risk.

On yet a closer scale, is there someone at Church that you do not know; is there someone at Sunday Mass that you see but never have spoken to even though you may have seen them there for a long time? Reach out and take the risk. Next time you are at Mass, make it a point to speak to someone you don’t know; make the connection that leads to that Kingdom that God wants for all of us.

Just as Jesus said to that young man, “selling all” we have can be as simple and as difficult as giving up our fear, giving up our discomfort, overcoming our anxiousness and reaching out to make that connection. It is through this that we can have the Kingdom of God here and now and experience a full joy that God has for us.