

## Seek First the Kingdom of God

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In the year 63 BC, Rome invaded Palestine . 129 years later, Palestine fought back. At least a group of zealous militants fought back. In 66 AD, these militants rose up against Roman rule. And four years later, in 70 AD, Rome crushed that movement and destroyed the city of Jerusalem and with it the holy Temple . All of the gospels and about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the entire New Testament is written AFTER this event. The holy Temple and the holy City are gone and so it is significant that the bible writers talk so much about the Temple and tearing it down and raising it up and there being a new Jerusalem. The imagery is directly tied to their experience of overwhelmingly loss.

Matthew's gospel is written about 85 AD, some 15 years AFTER the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple . And like much of the New Testament, it is responding to the realities of its own day.

There's one more little factoid that I want to share with you before comment specifically on today's gospel reading. There is a Greek word that shows up a lot in the New Testament...the word is *baselia*. It is usually translated as kingdom, but it can also mean realm, or commonwealth, empire...all variations of the same thing really. So, after the Roman Empire has destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple , the writer of Matthew's gospel places these words in the mouth of Jesus...Seek first the baselia, the kingdom or empire of God...the reign of God is used over against the reign of Caesar. With that in mind, hear Matthew 6.33: "Seek first the baselia of God...and God will give you everything you need."

It's in the context of loss, that Matthew says, "Enough with the worrying. Yes, human wealth built a temple, but human forces destroyed it. Things come and go. But the flowers and the birds show us that what really matters in life can't be taken from us."

It's a pretty important lesson for us to learn, or relearn as the case may be. Sometimes we worry about what could go wrong, and while we are worrying, we become more and more immobilized. Fear freezes us and we are tormented by what could be. But once we face the situation, we often find that we are able to deal with it. We are stronger, wiser, more resilient than we thought. We spring into action, and we sometimes find that worrying about a thing was worse than actually facing it.

It's pretty seditious for the person we call Matthew then to tell his community, "Why be frozen with fear? Rome has already killed some of our heroes. Rome has already occupied our land. Rome has already destroyed our holy city and temple. Why worry about what the empire might do...they've done it! They will probably continue doing it! We don't need to be afraid of it getting bad; it's already bad. So focus on the counter-empire of God, the realm of hope and justice, and by working toward establishing that kind of reality, what we really need – hope, dignity, fulfillment...will be provided. Let's be the good we deserve and desire. Seek first the baselia of God and God will give you everything you need.

Difficult things happen in life. Natural disasters in Myanmar, AIDS, lethal homophobia in Jamaica, marriage inequality in Florida, wars that seem to be endless, an economy that is already crushing people of limited means...difficulties happen. Suffering happens. It would be callous to use this scripture to deny the very real pain that far too many people suffer. But much of the pain in our world is caused by empire...by politics and human prejudice, avarice and selfishness. But then there is this prophetic word...when the way of the world isn't working out, seek first the way of God...the way of justice and generosity and goodwill...THEN when enough of us are doing that, everything we need to make things better will be available to us.

About 8 chapters later, Matthew continues this theme. In Matthew 14, Jesus is facing a hungry crowd, and so with limited resources he starts to feed them. Five loaves and two fish...not enough to feed a crowd, not even enough to adequately feed his small group. But in the kingdom of God, people would share. People would give what they had, even if it was ridiculously small. And so Jesus gives his limited resources, and miraculously, everyone is fed.

If that event factually happened, I believe it was the miracle that happens every time we selflessly give. It is unlikely that in an entire crowd, no one would have had some food on them. When the people saw Jesus give his few rolls and couple of fish, others probably did the same. One person had some dried meat, another a couple of pieces of fruit, someone else some wine, someone else a loaf of bread. When every one gave what they had, no matter how meager it was, they discovered their pooled resources proved to be abundant.

In a divinely ordered world, everyone would do and give what they could, and when everyone did that, it would prove to be enough. One person, like Jesus, can model the way, and when others follow the example, the miracle takes place. *Seek first the basilea of God, and God will give you everything you need.*

Robert Holden shares the same message today, doesn't he? If you want love, share love. If you want joy, be joyful. If you want kindness, be kind to someone. If you want to be accepted, accept others. We can be what we want. And what we want is to live in the basilea of God...and to do that, we simply focus on God's way of love, compassion, generosity, goodwill. We give what we need, and our needs will often be met.

Seek first the kingdom of God ...and God will provide what we need to be our own blessings and to be the answers to our own prayers. This is the Good News. Amen.

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*I am blessed as I bless others.  
I am the blessing I seek.  
I am healed.  
I am prosperous.  
I am happy.  
I am a citizen in the kingdom of God .*

*And so it is!*

**J. Donald Walters:** "Happiness is an attitude of mind, born of the simple determination to be happy under all outward circumstances."