



17th Sunday in Ordinary Time Civ
Excerpts from Genesis 18, Colossians 2 & Luke 11

Pray it Forwards

To follow Jesus is to pray for God's kingdom to come on earth, as in heaven.
Fr David King – 24th July 2022

Please take some time with the Gospel reading before looking at this (Luke 11.1-13)

1. Thy

In this beautiful Gospel, Jesus tells us to pray 'thy kingdom come' – so, what on earth is he talking about? Hopefully this little story will help us find out. In February of 1990, Martin Dent, who was a lecturer in politics at Keele University, stood up at the end of one of his lectures, and asked his students to sign a petition that he'd started calling on the government to cancel the debt owed by the world's poorest nations.

- Martin Dent was your typical eccentric academic – complete with food stains all over this tatty suit – but he was also a devout Christian and had experienced in Africa just how completely crippling debt repayment was for developing nations. Compelled by his sense of justice, and by his Christian faith, he felt moved to do something about it.
- Off the back of his petition, with a friend of his, he founded 'Jubilee 2000'. This was in the early 90's - you may remember it. Jubilee 2000 combined the biblical idea of Jubilee (in which every 50th year debts were cancelled and slaves were freed) along with his thinking about debt relief. The movement grew and grew and soon people from all over the world were onboard all calling for \$90 billion dollars of debt (owed by the world's poorest nations) to be cancelled by the year 2000.
- Many people said Martin was crazy. For many years the World Bank and the British Treasury had told everyone the debt simply could not be cancelled. There were rules. But what they hadn't banked on was the sheer weight of public support for this campaign. Here in Britain, everyone was shocked to learn about the injustice that this country was inflicting on the world's poorest people. But it wasn't just everyday people like you and me that got it. It caught everyone's attention.
- Soon Tony Blair and Gordon Brown met with Martin Dent to see what they could do (Gordon Brown's mother wrote to him about it, calling for cancellation of the debt, and she told him not to waste money on a stamp to reply). Bono was onboard of course, and Pope John Paul II. In 1998 a human chain was formed around the G8 summit meeting in Birmingham, with everyone chanting for debt cancellation. Famously, their cries were audible to the negotiators inside the conference rooms.
- In the end, 24 million people signed Martin Dent's Petition that he started at the end of one of his lectures (I think I'm right in saying that's still a world record for a petition). Jubilee 2000 managed to secure the cancellation of more than \$130 billion dollars of debt owed the 35 poorest countries of the world. The money saved by these nations was redirected to healthcare and education. And all this without the help of any social media - it not having been invented yet. Having been one of the most successful campaigns ever, Jubilee 2000 dissolved – as planned – at the end of the Jubilee year, the year 2000. It dissolved into several smaller groups (in the UK, the work of Jubilee Debt Campaign continues to this day). Martin Dent himself died on 3rd May 2014, aged 89 years old. The Guardian said that Jubilee 2000 was "one of the most important global movements for justice in our time".

2. Kingdom

- What a wonderful story. And although it wasn't at all an exclusively Christian movement (rather a strange alliance of politicians, pop-stars, bankers, everyone) many commentators have said that key to its success was the hundreds and thousands of church members that were driving this, organising it, and spreading the word through their local networks, *all working to make God's kingdom come*.
- Now, key to understanding the Jewish hope in the Kingdom of God, is understanding a little of their history. We mustn't forget that the history of the Israelites had been dominated by various oppressors. The Egyptians had enslaved them, then the Babylonians had deported and exiled them, and now the Romans were occupying their land, taking their produce and money and making life unbearable.
- Their hope, their big hope, was that God was going to save them from this tyranny by bringing his kingdom to earth. This was never about them going to heaven, it was about God's kingdom coming here. And central to this idea was that God himself was going to come and be King among them, and he was going to bring his peace and justice with him, first to Jerusalem and then to the World. That was their hope! That God was going to come and dwell among them as king, and he was going to bring with him his kingdom of peace and justice.
- So when Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of God, and when he said that the Kingdom of God was close at hand, he really did mean that this was all finally happening, in him! And of course it *was* all happening in Jesus, only it didn't look anything like they expected it to look like at all. Jesus *was* God dwelling among them as King, only he was a crucified King. And he *was* here to bring peace and justice, only that meant not sending in the tanks and the bombs to boot the Romans out as they expected, but sending in the poor in spirit, and the gentle, and the peacemakers.
- But the nub of it is that Jesus brought the kingdom, yes, but he didn't *fully* establish it here. It was kind of half here, half not here. This begs so many questions (why would he do this? what's the delay in fully establishing the kingdom?) but that's what our faith is about. And it makes so much sense of Jesus' prayer! This is a prayer, not that we may go to heaven, but rather for God's kingdom to come here - 'Thy kingdom come, on earth as in heaven'. Jesus told us to pray for the coming of the kingdom.

3. Come

- Now last year some of us did a little book club through Lent, which was an absolutely lovely thing, I really enjoyed it. And the last chapter of the book was about the Our Father and the author made an absolutely stunning insight into this prayer. When we say the Our Father, he said, we often pray it backwards. In our prayers we usually start with the last line 'deliver us from evil' – that is 'Lord take away all the bad stuff from me'. Then we might move on to 'Forgive us our sins' – that is 'I'm really sorry for all the bad stuff I do'. And maybe, just maybe, we might get to 'Give us this day our daily bread' that is 'Lord, give me what I need to follow you'. But we would rarely get to 'Thy Kingdom come' and never would we simply pray 'Father, may your name be honoured'. We pray it backwards!
- Whereas actually, if we really want to follow Jesus, we have to pray it forwards. In all the chaotic and painful circumstances of our lives, to simply say 'Father, may your name be honoured' and then to pray 'thy kingdom come, on earth as in heaven'. That's what we should be praying. Thank you Tom Wright for that beautiful insight! And the great thing is that the Church, at its finest, has not only prayed for the coming of God's kingdom, but it has made it present here through living justice, and mercy and forgiveness. So that's what today is about – praying for God's kingdom to come.
Jesus, through my actions, and through my prayers, may your kingdom come, on earth as in heaven.