

Homily – Live Into the Kingdom of God

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Today, I want to begin with a portion of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character...

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

I like this dream.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had the courage and trust to dream. He had passion for a dream that was of God's Kingdom. His passion was that the Kingdom is not only what happens after death, but it is also what can happen in this world and in this lifetime. And, there is no doubt that Dr. King helped make the world a better place, more like the Kingdom of God.

My desire is that we would have the passion and the wonder to dream about God's Kingdom in this world. My longing is that we would have the courage to be the hands and feet and voice of Jesus to right the wrongs and expand the beauty that is of God's Kingdom. Don't you want that too?

In today's Gospel reading we have an interplay between the Sadducees and Jesus that can be better understood by starting with some history.

Like our contemporary Christian spirituality, ancient Jewish spirituality shifted and morphed over time. For a long time Jewish spirituality did not include the concept of resurrection or life after death. Life was only on this earth, and with death there was an ending. Death was final. It was not until four hundred years before Jesus, that the Old Testament book of Daniel, shows the first hints of resurrection in Jewish spiritual tradition. By the time we get to Jesus time, the Pharisees had incorporated Greek spirituality with its ideas of an eternal soul into Jewish spirituality. However, the Sadducees, another Jewish sect, continued to disagree with the concept of a resurrection and life after death. That is the background of the argument that we see in today's gospel lesson.

And, the Sadducees think they are being clever in their argument about the ridiculousness of a resurrection and a women with seven dead husbands.

But, Jesus refuses to take the bait and answers the Sadducees' question by pointing out that God and God's Kingdom are much more than we could ever imagine.

Life after death is hard for us to imagine. We have some hints from Jesus that indicate that we think much too small and that we incorrectly layer in our human baggage into that imagining.

Now, to help us imagine, I want to make some distinctions between the ways that I view life after death, the word "living", heaven, and God's Kingdom.

First, life after death is the state of being that we achieve after our physical bodies die. We are resurrected into a new way of being that we have very little knowledge about. In my spiritual journey, I believe that in this lifetime we are each an imperfect union of spirit and matter, but with life after death, we are each resurrected into something that is more perfect.

God created this cycle for us, and let me repeat it. Each of us is the imperfect joining of matter in spirit, and with our birth we take on form, and with our death our union of matter and spirit gives up its form. We take on a new form, a form that we can scarcely imagine. We all have this cycle of living and dying and then living again.

And, using Jesus' words from today's Gospel reading, in life after death, "*[we] cannot die anymore, because [we] are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection.*" That is what I believe about life after death.

And, then there is the word "living." I wish we had a separate word for our state in life after death. As children of God and as children of the resurrection, I wish there was a distinct word, but Jesus tends to use the word "living" for that state of being

after death. That is why he says that God is the *God of the living*, because he conflates our two states of being with one word. God is with us in this lifetime but also in the next lifetime. To God "*all of them are alive.*"

I guess that Jesus uses one word, "living", to help us see the connection or even commonality between the two states of being. Eternal life is for both now and then. It is the Holy Spirit that animates us or gives us life and consciousness in our current state of being, and maybe the Holy Spirit does the same in life after death. I don't know. Maybe we have this clue from today's Gospel reading, but I still find it confusing and wish we had another word rather than living. If you come up with one, then let me know.

And now, I want to look at the terms heaven and Kingdom of God. For me, these two terms mean the same thing. They are not a place, and certainly not a place up in the sky. Instead, everything that we learn from Jesus in the Gospels tells us that heaven or God's Kingdom is a state of being. It is the state of being in which we once again allow God to be in charge. We give up our own need to be in control, and we let God rule instead.

In this lifetime, most of us have egos and false selves that get in the way of our relationship with God, others, and self. Do we need to be in control, be admired, feel useful, or be better than others? Our egos and false selves get in the way of letting God be in charge. And, by extension they get in the way of heaven and God's Kingdom. It can be hard for us to achieve that state of being in which we let God be in control. It can be hard for us to accept the Kingdom of God which is made available to us.

Now, you may have noticed that I am speaking of heaven and the Kingdom of God as they are in this lifetime. I am one of those who believes that heaven and the Kingdom of God are a state of being that we all achieve after death. It is part of our resurrection in life after death. But, for me, heaven and God's Kingdom are also part of this lifetime. That may be a bit of a different way of think than some of you are used to. God's Kingdom is now and then. And, to our delight, we can begin eternal life now.

Those who start eternal life a little earlier than others have done the work to let go of the false self and ego. They have accepted the grace of God that is freely given and responded to that grace with service, gratitude and love. And, in fact, any time we let God be in charge, any time we are following the will of God, we are accepting the Kingdom that is already made available to us.

The good news that we have from Jesus is that God has created us to be part of God's Kingdom.

The invitation that we have from Jesus as to accelerate our entry in the Kingdom so that it is in this lifetime.

The promise that we have from Jesus is that the kingdom is more than we can ask or imagine.

In the Kingdom, all are equal.

In the Kingdom, all things that separate us from one another are removed so that we can be with one another. Race, ethnicity, culture, power, status, and even gender are removed so that we are all equal with one another. We all let go of the false self and embrace the true self that God has created within each and every one of us.

And, in the Kingdom, freedom and justice are achieved, and they are not our type of freedom and justice, but freedom and justice that are of God.

And, in the Kingdom, every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

Again, I like this dream about the Kingdom.

Today, Jesus reassures us about life after death. We are all children of the resurrection, and Jesus challenges us to think about that next life in new and bigger ways. Jesus also challenges us to accept the reality that heaven and God's Kingdom are already around us. We have some hard work to do to live into that Kingdom, but it is worth it. Accept and live into the glory of God's Kingdom.