

"On Earth as it Is in Heaven"

By David Chandler -- October 2004 Pastor's Column

Jesus talked about a kingdom in which God's will would be done "on earth as it is in heaven." It would be a kingdom without territory or boundaries: you could not say, "here it is or there." Rather, it would fill the whole earth as yeast permeates a loaf of bread or salt permeates a dish of food. Luke calls this hidden kingdom the "kingdom of God." (Matthew calls it the "kingdom of Heaven," not because it is in heaven, but because his Jewish-Christian audience had a taboo against uttering the name of God.) Most strikingly, Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of God was not a dream for the future but a present reality for those who seek it. "The kingdom of God is in the midst of you," he told his disciples.

Jesus pointed to many surprising examples of citizens of the kingdom through characters in his stories and among people he met: a member of a heretical religious sect, the Samaritans, who helped a man in need; a Roman soldier, most likely a pagan, who nevertheless demonstrated his faith in the power of God; the wayward son of a wealthy father who spent his inheritance in riotous living but returned to his father in desperation because he had nowhere else to turn; a prostitute who washed Jesus feet with her tears; a beggar at a rich man's door; children at play, in all their spontaneity. Concern about these people's religious belief systems is notably absent, even downplayed, in these examples. Rather, Jesus' examples are simple people, in touch with something real at the core of their humanity.

When a rich young ruler asked how he could enter the kingdom of God, Jesus challenged him to give away his wealth, something he could not bring himself to do. When Nicodemus sought out Jesus in the night, Jesus told him that despite his status as a respected religious leader, he had no true spiritual understanding and would have to start over from the beginning like a newborn child. It is not that wealth, power, social status, or adherence to religious dogma disqualify a person from membership in the kingdom of God. It is just that these things can give us the illusion of invulnerability or superiority and alienate us from our human condition and our fellow man. God dwells within each person and is met at the core of our being when all else is stripped away.

The Gospel of John describes a "light that enlightens every man". That inner light is the very presence of God within. If we acknowledge the presence of God in each person we meet, our human relationships are transformed. If we live in the light of God's presence in our own life, God's love expresses itself through us. Only as we walk in that light will God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.