

Embodying and Enacting the Kingdom of God
In a Time of Disconnected Realities

Luke 20: 1-8

November 6, 2016

Reality no longer bites, it sorts. This coming Election Day, separate theatres will open so that viewers can get their political news inside the comfort of their own fact bubbles.

Timothy Egan

The religious authorities ask Jesus by what authority he's doing what he does.

In my reading of the gospels, Jesus represents more than Jesus. Jesus represents a whole reality, a reality he calls the kingdom of God.

Jesus embodies and enacts this reality. Jesus reveals this reality by making it visible. Making it tangible. Making it seen, heard and felt by other people.

The kingdom of God is a way of being human in the world. A way of embodying certain traits and qualities. And a way of interacting with the world. It's a way of relating, as a human with these traits and qualities, to God, to other people, to oneself and to all of creation.

The kingdom of God isn't so much a time or place as it's an occurrence. The kingdom of God *happens*. And it can occur, it can happen in any time and place where people embody and enact it.

The kingdom of God is a manifestation of Holy Communion. It's a way of living in *holy union with...*

The kingdom of God isn't something to be believed in, it's not something to wait for, it's something Jesus calls people to be and do.

Jesus embodies and enacts the kingdom of God, and he calls other people to join him in embodying and enacting the kingdom of God.

He says, follow me, join me.

Follow me, join me, by undergoing a transformation of your heart and mind. By opening your heart and mind. By embodying love, compassion, empathy, mercy, humility, righteousness, justice, wisdom. By being liberating, healing and reconciling.

Follow me, join me, by opening your eyes and seeing reality anew.

By opening your ears and hearing reality anew.

By doing not just *what* I do, but *how* I do it.

Jesus invites people to embody the traits and qualities he embodies. To know the world as he knows it. To interact with the world the way he interacts with it.

Jesus calls those who follow him, who join him, to show others in the world what the kingdom of God looks, sounds and feels like.

That's how the kingdom of God spreads. From person to person. Through encounters.

Through interactions. Through relationships. Through communities. Through what people say to each other and do for each other.

But here's the thing. Not everyone sees, hears or feels this reality that Jesus embodies and enacts. Their hearts and minds aren't open to it. Their eyes and ears don't perceive it. They're not sensitive to it. They're not picking up on it.

They don't *get* Jesus. They don't *get* this reality Jesus is conveying.

There's a disconnect between the reality some people embody and enact, and the reality Jesus embodies and enacts. And this disconnect is the source of the question the religious authorities pose to Jesus—by what authority are you doing what you do? Who authorized you to do what you're doing?

It's an interesting question. The religious authorities are, after all, the authorities on all things religious within the reality they inhabit. And they didn't authorize Jesus. So who did?

In a sense it's a rhetorical question. They already know the answer. Nobody authorized Jesus. In the reality they inhabit, Jesus has no authority to do what he's doing. Which means, in the reality they inhabit, Jesus must stop doing what he's doing.

But Jesus doesn't inhabit the reality they inhabit. Jesus inhabits the reality he inhabits. The one he calls the kingdom of God. And it's from this reality, the kingdom of God, that Jesus derives his authority.

Though I think it's inaccurate to say, Jesus *derives* his authority from the kingdom of God. I think it more accurate to say, Jesus *is* the authority on the kingdom of God. Jesus is the authoritative embodiment and enactor of the kingdom of God. Jesus is the authoritative occurrence of the kingdom of God.

And Jesus is the authoritative teacher of the kingdom of God. Do you want to know about the kingdom of God? Do you want to experience the kingdom of God? Go *interact* with Jesus. He's the authority. He makes it happen.

Thing is, those who don't *get* Jesus can't understand his authority. How can they?

If they don't see, hear or feel the reality Jesus embodies and enacts, if their hearts and minds aren't open to it, how can they understand the nature of his authority? The nature of his authority is the very reality they don't see, hear or feel.

So there's not much Jesus can do here. There's no quick answer, no straight answer he can give them. If they don't see, hear or feel it, if their hearts and minds aren't open to it, then they're just not going to get it. All he can do is expose their inability to perceive and understand his reality and authority.

Disconnected realities. That's what I perceive between Jesus and the religious authorities. Disconnected realities.

It's more than a disagreement over ideas, beliefs or behaviors. It's a whole different way of seeing, hearing and feeling reality. A different way of experiencing reality, understanding reality and interacting with reality.

So different that people who experience and inhabit reality one way can seem disconnected from people who experience and inhabit reality a different way.

Disconnected realities. Disconnected people.

People who live in disconnected realities often talk past one another. They don't connect. Sometimes they don't even really see one another. And sometimes they come into conflict with one another.

This seems to be the case in the gospels when we read about the interactions between Jesus and the authorities. They talk past one another. They don't connect. They come into conflict with one another. And one side conspires to kill the other.

I think we're seeing this phenomena at work in our country today. One of the things the presidential election has exposed to me is the degree to which different people in our country live in different realities, and how the different realities people experience and inhabit are disconnecting whole groups of people from one another, and in some cases, driving angrier and more desperate forms of conflict between them.

This is not something new in our country. And it's not unique to our country. But for me, the election campaign has exposed the degree to which this exists today in our country.

I think that during this campaign, some people have become further entrenched in their take on reality. This campaign has deepened divisions between people with competing realities. It has disconnected people in more ways. And it's heightened the level of conflict between people, so much so that the only thing left that's connecting them is their conflict.

The divisions and the conflicts we're facing aren't just over ideas, not just over particular policies. The divisions and conflicts are arising from the different ways people are experiencing and inhabiting reality itself. And these types of divisions and conflicts are far more difficult to reconcile. They go much deeper. They're far more encompassing.

Yet this is what we face today. And it's not going to end the day after the election. It's possible that our country will become more divided and more conflicted in the weeks, months and years ahead.

A question for us is this—shall we commit ourselves to follow and join Jesus Christ in his reality in the midst of all this?

If so, what does that look like, sound like and feel like, to us and to other people?

What does it look like, sound like and feel like when the kingdom of God occurs through who we are, what we do and how we do it, through how we interact with one another and the world?

What does our manifesting *holy union with*...look like, sound like and feel like in the midst of the challenges, divisions and conflicts we face today?