

At Hand

Alan Zundel at the HeartAwake Center, Sept. 13th 2007

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“The reign of God is at hand.” According to Mark, this was the theme of Jesus’ preaching: “the reign of God is at hand.” So what’s this mean, to be ‘at hand’?

It doesn’t mean off in the distant future, after the Antichrist has come and all the plagues at the end of the world or something have taken place. *At hand*. Your hand—it’s right there at the end of your arm. ‘At hand’ doesn’t mean in the remote past when Jesus was walking the earth. It doesn’t mean in some other place, where there’s somebody with special knowledge or special qualities, spiritual gifts of some kind.

‘At hand’ means within reach. Here, right with you. Like if you said, ‘I always keep my cell phone at hand,’ it means it’s right there with you, so that you can take hold of it when you need it. Any time you want, it’s right there. You keep your purse at hand, right? You keep your wallet at hand. You keep, who knows what—you keep your wife at hand. [*laughs*] Whatever’s important to get you through life.

So the reign of God is at hand: it’s within reach, it’s right there, it’s in front of you, it’s always accessible, it’s within your grasp—but it doesn’t always seem that way.

The second part of the theme of his preaching, according to Mark—the first part is “the reign of God is at hand”—the second part is, in the English translation anyway, “repent and believe the good news.” Right there there’s something a little odd about the juxtaposition of repentance and good news, because usually in the Old Testament when a prophet is speaking for God saying ‘repent,’ it’s usually something like ‘repent in ashes, rend your clothes.’ You know, this great sorrow for how you’ve neglected to take care of the vulnerable in the community or turned toward idols or something like this.

But this is not ‘repent, grovel in the dirt,’ this is not ‘repent, bring to mind all your sins,’ this is not ‘repent, you’ve been idolators.’ This is “repent and believe the good news.” Good news. *Good news!* Happy! Believe in something happy, believe in something positive—what would that be? Well, it’s circular: the kingdom of God is within your grasp, it’s right there in front of you—that’s the good news.

So why repent? Well, ‘repent,’ the Greek—maybe I’ve said this before, maybe I’ll say it again [*laughs*—it’s a change of mind and heart, it’s not necessarily focusing on your shortcomings or your sins. It’s not, ‘the kingdom of God is within your grasp if only you were a better person, the kingdom of God is within your grasp if only you could overcome your flaws.’ It’s not ‘the kingdom of God is within your grasp if you could grow beyond your neuroses.’ It’s not ‘the kingdom of God is within your grasp if you meditate harder, or pray more often, or learn to be kinder,’ or any of this. It’s just within your grasp *if you open your heart up* and allow it to be present. It’s always with you; it’s in your heart.

Now, to say, “the kingdom of God is within you”—from another part of the Gospels, I believe from Luke—“the reign of God is within you,” that doesn’t mean it’s buried within you somewhere deep down that you have to work real hard to get at. Because it’s *at hand*; it’s within your grasp. It’s within you *and* it’s within your grasp. It’s just there, in your heart—you open it up, you *believe* in it, and it’s there. The world is transformed, now you’ve entered into the reign of God. God is controlling it all; God is within everything. What do you see? Look around—what do you see here? What do I see? I see magical beings, these astounding, beautiful creatures. Loving, kind, generous, honest—

[Voice:] Now don’t go *too* far.

Don’t get carried away? [laughs]

[Another voice:] And, Alan, God is in the midst of Len, of all of us.

All of us. All of us all of the time, because the kingdom of God is *at hand*. Not at his hand, or their hand over there; it’s just *at hand* for all of us. It’s just accepting it, opening yourself up to it.

Not that difficult, yet it seems difficult at times. It seems far off at times. Why should it seem so far off? Why should something that’s *at hand* seem so difficult to find? I think the hard truth here is that when it seems far off it’s because we don’t want it. However you describe that refusal, however you explain it, it’s there lying there in front of you and you don’t pick it up. Or more accurately, you carry it in your heart and you refuse to acknowledge it. So refusal.

You know the reign of God is there, not because Jesus said it, not because I’m saying it, not because anything outside yourself—you know it’s there because it’s in your heart. Your heart longs for this and says to you, ‘it’s right here, all’s you have to do is open yourself to it.’ Live out of that, rest in that and express it, and it’s there. So what is this refusal? What is this negligence, where something is at hand and we overlook it, or leave it lying there and don’t pick it up? So many distractions, so many masks that we can use, so many different ways of disguising the truth from ourselves.

But to go into all of that doesn’t really matter, because it’s really simple. It’s really simple. You *know* the truth. You know the truth of love. You know the truth of compassion. Always right now, in the present, it’s there available to you. You don’t have to wait for that perfect time, that perfect place. You don’t have to wait to grow into it—in fact, the growing comes from entering into it, and then you start to grow. There’s no prerequisites. There’s nothing required. It’s just a matter of acknowledging the truth.

It’s at hand.

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