Quieting my thoughts during centering prayer or meditation has been an ongoing learning experience for me. One of the ways that I have found that helps to draw myself back in when I become distracted is to bring to mind a mantra, often a few words taken from a prayer or hymn.

A mantra I often turn to at the beginning of and throughout quiet time is *“Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, I want to see you”*. I don’t think I realized until this week that the hymn lyric is derived from the letter to the Ephesians we read today. It’s a beautifully written poetic prayer to a church community in thanksgiving for their faithfulness. Paul, or one of Paul’s followers writing in his name and style, shares with the congregation that he is praying that the eyes of their hearts are enlightened, that they will shine from within with the light of Christ.

This Sunday we are at the last Sunday of the Church calendar, the celebration of Christ the King. Christ the King Sunday was proclaimed by Pope Pius XI in 1925, response to the rising power of dictatorships and fascism in Europe. Pope Pius was looking to open, or most likely, to re-open the eyes and hearts of the Christian world to the reality that God in Christ is the ruler, the king that has the last say in our lives. It is the Kingdom of God that Jesus holds as his central message in Matthew.

It’s been pretty convenient for those of us thinking about the Kingdom that Richard Rohr in his daily meditation this week is focused on Jesus and the Reign of God. He reminds us that the Kingdom of God is not what we have thought of as heaven,…..a place we cannot be with God until after we die. God’s Kingdom is what Jesus tells us is “close at hand”. (Mt 10:7) It’s not a portent of second coming, but of being in the present, with Christ at the center.

*“I think of the Kingdom of God as the Really Real (with two capital Rs). That experience of the Really Real—the “Kingdom” experience—is the heart of Jesus’ teaching.*

*God gives us just enough tastes of God’s realm to believe in it and to want it more than anything. In the parables, Jesus never says the Kingdom is totally now or totally later. It’s always now-and-not-yet. When we live inside the Really Real, we live in a “threshold space” between this world and the next. We learn how to live between heaven and earth, one foot in both worlds, holding them precious together.”*

Between heaven and earth, in a place where God gives to us glimpses of what is possible in the Kingdom, or perhaps more accurately, the Kin-dom. It is a place, an existence where the dominion over hearts is only possible because of the reign of Love and the Light of Christ in hearts and minds; More than a platitude, a lovely sounding theory or heart-felt wish.

Open the eyes of our hearts Lord, give us a glimpse of your Kin-dom. I like that word, glimpse. Something I can’t quite completely hold onto and something that gives me hope. It’s a glimmer, something we see out of the corner of our eye, right on the edge of our vision. Just enough to make us want to know more and quite possibly yearn to be more.

We talk about Jesus ushering in the Kingdom of God. But “*Jesus is not advocating a regime change”*, writes David Lose. *“Rather, Jesus was announcing the advent of an entirely different way of being in relationship with each other and with God. It’s not the ruler that changes, it’s the realm in which we live.”*

It’s a different way of being and a different way of seeing….living in the realm of God. We cannot see who we are truly called to be as members of the body of Christ without Jesus’ light opening our eyes and hearts to all that can be. If we are willing to declare Jesus as Lord, and we are content to leave it at that, to hold on to our private declaration of belief, then we can go about our lives just as they have been the day before, and never feel the need or longing to seek something different. But what if we were to allow God to transform into actions, to bring us closer into relationship in Christs name? Then we are welcomed into a new realm, one that leaves the old rules of order behind.

I think that’s why Jesus uses of those parables to help us, each with their own quirky, unsettling way of seeing the world.

* Employers that pay every laborer the same wage, regardless of when they come to work
* Shepherds that leave their flocks without protection to bring home the one sheep that wandered away

Over and over again we are shown that God’s economy, that the wideness of God’s mercy and love cannot be measured by our own. It is love and mercy beyond all understanding. And once we realize, once the eyes of our hearts are opened, then we might get that glimpse of Christ in each one, each of “the least of these”, that Jesus talks of in Matthew. And then we may find we are living in a new realm and nothing can be the same as it once was.

And we may find we are surprised, just as Jamie+ spoke about last week, that God shows up in places and people we least expect. It’s interesting to me that neither group of people, whether sheep or goats, had any clue that their actions or lack of action had any reflection on their thinking Jesus was with them in those moments. After all, you know, we are a little bit of both – part sheep and part goat, sinner and saint. God in Christ shows up, nonetheless. Shows up in leftover accommodations, shows up on a cross. Not in false strength and power grabs, but in vulnerability and service.

When was it we saw you? One of the questions that regularly came up for us when I was in seminary was “who is not at the table?” Who is it that sits below our line of sight? I was listening to an exchange in the Senate the other day when one member asked another to please put on a mask. The member responded that there was no one within 50 feet, completely missing the fact that a Senate stenographer was sitting 6 feet away, just below the member’s line of sight. Who is it that somehow seems invisible to us?

Open the eyes of our hearts, dear Jesus. We want to see you.

If we were to look just below the surface of the problems that we can easily see in our communities, we will be present to the pervasive conditions that caused them in the first place. It is there that God calls us into kinship, into the recreation of viable community built upon the foundation of love and mercy. God, the just shepherd in Ezekiel, is calling back the people out of exile into a holy embrace and the assurance of mercy, “I will feed them with justice.” (34:16).

The surprising scandal of the Kin-dom of God is that it is right in the midst of the mess and the beauty of life. Once we have received the gift of open hearts and eyes bright with Christs’ Light, we cannot go back to life as it once was. It’s not a matter of who is or isn’t a “good Christian”, sinners and saints all. Being “good” is not the measure. Opening our eyes to the world around us takes all the courage we might try to muster on our own, which is exactly why we need Jesus’ beside us lighting the way.

I offer today this prayer for mercy from the Rev. Becca Stevens, founder of Thistle Farm and Magdalene Ministries. It can be found in her book Love Heals:

*In Your spirit of mercy, as solid as the ground upon which we make our stand, help us recall when we were hungry, afraid, sick or imprisoned by bonds and burdens. May that mercy be forged into compassion that loves the whole world without judgment. Forgive us again when we fail to show mercy or come into Your temple for solace and not for strength. Pardon our blindness when we didn’t see You in the person we called our enemy. Help us let go of tired bitterness passed on by generations who forgot the freedom of forgiveness. Unite us in the truth that love is the most powerful force for change, and teach us to preach love in action, L*ord, in *Your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.*