

## Matthew's Good News: The Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand

by Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM



This week I will continue to share portions from my early tapes and books on the *Great Themes of Scripture*. While these talks first launched my public teaching ministry in 1973, I hope they still contain some relevant wisdom for today, especially when paired with insights from my friend and CAC teacher Brian McLaren.

The great themes of the New Testament continue those of the Hebrew Bible, and one of those “great themes” is the Gospel itself. In ancient times, a “gospel” was a sharing of good news. Why did the Gospel writers choose to use the Greek word *euangelion*, which means “good news”? I think it’s because the story of Jesus was *the* news that transformed their lives. It was Good News of unconditional love, that we are loved, and that our entire lives can and should be based on the absolute love of God. That centers and grounds everything. What a tragedy that so much of Christianity has been made bad news, and has joined with the bad news of Empire, scapegoating, racism, war, sexism, and destruction of the planet. How far we must be from the experience of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John!

Matthew wants to show that Jesus has come to proclaim and to establish “the kingdom of God.” Jesus says, “Turn around! The kingdom of heaven is near” (Matthew 4:17). The realm of God is right here, right now, in the present tense. The relationship with God’s love that sets us free is in our midst. We have to have the humility and trust to turn around and see it.

Here’s how Brian McLaren describes it:

Jesus forms a movement of people who trust him and believe his message. They believe that they don’t have to wait for this or that to happen, but rather that they can begin living in a new and better way now, a way of life Jesus conveys by the pregnant phrase *kingdom of God*. Life for them now is about an interactive relationship—reconciled to God, reconciled to one another—and so they see their entire lives as an opportunity to make the beautiful music of God’s kingdom so that more and more people will be drawn into it, and so that the world will be changed by their growing influence.<sup>1</sup>

*It is a much greater message than just individual salvation, which has not gotten us very far at all.*

Jesus preaches to “turn around,” or in Greek *metanoia*, which literally means to “change your mind.” It does not mean self-flagellation or being really down about ourselves, which is what the word “repent” has implied for most of us. It always involves an attitude of trust, letting go, and surrender. Originating with the Hebrew prophets, the biblical idea of *metanoia* is that of a change of mind and heart, a full turning around, a whole new transformation of one’s mentality and level of consciousness, more than “going to church” or following a new moral code.

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<sup>1</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth That Could Change Everything* (Thomas Nelson: 2006), 83.