

# July 3, 2022

## Living in Canada and in the Kingdom of God

### Luke 8:26-39

Here's an (obvious) true statement: we live in Canada. Canada, of course, is an amazing place to live. We can be SO thankful for this country in which we live.

Here's a (maybe less obvious, but just as) true statement: we also live in the Kingdom of God. When Jesus began His ministry, He said, "*The time promised by God has come at last! The Kingdom of God has come! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!*" (Mark 1:14-15). The Kingdom of God, which Jesus inaugurated, is our "other" reality.

How do we live in this tension? How do we balance our identity as citizens of Canada with our identity as citizens of the Kingdom of God?

#### ***Back to the Bible***

The Bible was written in different times: the Old Testament was the age of God-appointed rulers (judges) and kings; the New Testament age is one of foreign emperors. During this political situation, the Bible – especially Jesus – shows us what the Kingdom of God is like, what it looks like when **God is King**, when God's will "*is done on earth as it is in heaven.*" Whatever our political reality, as we look at the life and work of Jesus, we see who God desires us to be. Our task, as God's people, is to pray, "*Your Kingdom come and Your will be done*" AND to be active participants in making that happen.

What is the vision of human society that Jesus gives us? The Kingdom of God in all its fullness includes a vision of society radically different from the world around them. There is

- **no ethnic discrimination** (Luke 7:1-10, a Roman officer's slave is healed)
- **no social status distinction** (Luke 7:1-10, it's a slave who's life is saved)
- **no gender bias** (Luke 7:11-17, a widow is helped): "*In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith ... there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*" (Galatians 3:27-28).

Jesus goes on: "*Love your neighbour as yourself*" and "*Love each other as I have loved you*" (Luke 10:27, John 15:12). The Kingdom of God is a way of living in which love for people is as deep as Jesus' love for own mother and brothers (8:19-21) and His own disciples (8:22-25). He loves those who are ill physically (8:40-56), and, in today's reading, spiritually or mentally. In most cultures – in the past and today – this man, Legion, would have no future, no hope, no life. He would be marginalized. The good news of the Kingdom of God is God cares for this man as much as anyone else. This is the kind of society we are challenged to build. A society where God is King. Where we love on another in His name. A society where

- There is **equality**; everyone is equally important.
- There is **true and equal justice for all**: the legal system is just and fair. There are

- no double standards based on money, power, position, race, gender, or other criteria.
- There is special compassion for those who are most **vulnerable and suffering**. This is more than just justice; this is active mercy, compassion, and social change.
  - There is a commitment to **integrity, purity, righteousness, and holiness**. We choose to uphold the highest standards; we don't compromise into a cynical defeatism.

Of course, the religious powers-that-be had Jesus executed for challenging their status quo.

### ***Back to the future***

*"Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it,"* wrote George Santayana. History can just be a collection of stories. Or history can be a tool through which, by understanding where we come from and how we got here, we can best find our way forward.

Let's go back to Europe about 1400. Political and religious elites ruled nations with iron fists. A few – nobles, kings, bishops, popes – were very powerful, very wealthy, and (often) very corrupt. Almost all people lived in poverty and servitude. Those who were, ill, widowed, disabled, or of different ethnicity were abandoned. Those who had different beliefs were often killed. For the supposed "Age of Faith" it looked like anything but the Kingdom of God.

One of those who challenged this supposedly "Christian" culture was Jan Hus, rector of Prague University (1372-1415). Hus spoke against the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church (three different "popes" were literally battling for supremacy). One pope-want-to-be sold "indulgences" (he would forgive your sins if you paid enough money) to finance his military crusade against a rival pope-want-to-be. Hus argued we are forgiven from sin by genuine repentance, not through buying indulgences. He also contended that no pope or bishop should wage war in the name of Jesus; he should pray for his enemies and bless those that curse him. Unlike most preachers at the time, Hus was also an advocate for women. He believed women were given equal rights in the Bible, arguing women were made equally in the image of God. He allowed women to preach, leave abusive relationships, even serve in battle. That was revolutionary teaching for its time. In many churches it still is.

Hus argued our authority is the Bible, not a pope or religious tradition. He condemned corruption by those in authority. He was particularly concerned for the poor. Hus pleaded for a genuine love for Jesus, where people of God seek to live by Jesus' principles, love, and compassion, by caring for the poor and hurting, children, women, refugees, and foreigners. The "Christian" powers-that-be burned Jan Hus at the stake as a heretic in 1415.

The grassroots reforms he began, the Hussites, radically transformed Czech society. His courage and biblical teaching would inspire Martin Luther and other reformers, including the first Baptist leaders. July 6, the anniversary of his death, is still a holiday in the Czech Republic. His most famous words: *"Dear Faithful Christian, search for Truth, hear Truth, learn Truth, love Truth, speak the Truth, hold the Truth, and defend the Truth 'til death."*

How does Hus help us in 2022? We live in a political and social culture shaped by people like Jan Hus (and many others). They laid the groundwork for a radical reordering of European

(and thus North American) society based on Kingdom of God principles. Instead of privilege, power, and corruption by a wealthy few, society would be shaped by biblical values of equality, justice, compassion, and integrity. Those truly Christian ideals became cornerstones for democracy in countries like Canada. When political leaders defend equality, justice, compassion, and integrity as ideals for which we strive, our nation is at its best.

The challenge for us, facing the future, is not to forget the past. Power and wealth are still concentrated in the hands of a privileged few. There are those who, for personal or political reasons, promote division over equality, personal privilege over justice, self-interest over compassion, and deception (even outright lies) over integrity. We always risk returning to the corruption, dishonesty, and authoritarianism of medieval times. So, on this Canada Day, we need to treasure those legacies left us by John Hus and the other reformers. How can we champion God's values of equality for everyone? Justice for all? Compassion for those in need? Purity, mercy, honesty, and integrity? How can we model those values in our lives?

### ***Forward to the Future***

One of the great principles coming out from Jan Hus and other reformers is the privilege and responsibility to read and study Scripture for ourselves and, in community, to wrestle with who and what God is challenging us to be, do, and even vote – personally and corporately. We cannot defer responsibility to think or grow spiritually to someone outside authority (or online teacher). We make (and are responsible for) our own decisions before the Lord.

Our faith shapes our who we are and how we live in our neighbourhoods, province, and world. Christian faith is not just a personal, private thing promising eternal life in the future. Our faith shapes our entire being, worldview, attitudes, values, and actions. We live for Jesus – live like Jesus – live as citizens of His Kingdom – every moment of every day. It shapes how we interact with our neighbours. How we understand the news. How we post on social media. How we care for the environment. How we spend our time, money, energy.

Our Christian convictions may lead us in different political directions when it comes to social and political issues. That's OK. No political party is a "Christian" party. Each party has some platforms that can be supported as biblical. And each party has some platforms that, I would suggest, are not so biblical. Politically, we can engage in respectful dialogue. We can agree to disagree on politics AND still enjoy one another, be friends with one another, and love one another in the name of Jesus. The Kingdom of God is bigger than politics. For instance:

- John Diefenbaker, a Baptist (and Conservative) from Prince Albert, SK, said, "*Freedom is the right to be wrong, not the right to do wrong.*" He fervently believed we need to live out our Christian faith and try to do what is right in all things.
- Tommy Douglas, a Baptist (and founder of the CCF/NDP, architect of our public health system), from Weyburn, SK, said, "*Courage, my friends; it's not too late to build a better world.*" Like Diefenbaker, Douglas believed we need to live out our Christian faith and try to do what is right in all things.

Two people – both sharing the same Christian (specifically Baptist) convictions, both sharing

a similar cultural context (Saskatchewan), both championing equality, justice, compassion, and integrity – yet working out their faith in different political traditions. Agreeing to disagree on political preferences is just fine. Advocating and God’s values, for people, for our world, in the name of Jesus, is non-negotiable. That transcends politics.

How do we live in this tension between being citizens of Canada and citizens of the Kingdom of God? We live out our faith in Jesus. Read Scripture. Pray. Think. Dialogue. Study Jesus’ words. Pray some more. Think some more. Wrestle deeply with the tough issues. We make the best choices we can. And we always stay centred on the love of Jesus.

As you think about things political, social, cultural ... beware of loud voices in the media or on social media, even those who claim to be “Christian.” It’s easy to get swept up thinking “It’s so simple: so-and-so says this is **the** only Christian way of thinking on this issue” or “We’re Christian, so of course we’ll vote for this party.” We love easy answers. But real life is not so simple. Issues are complex. We need to think more critically. Deeply.

- What does **equality** look like in our community? Is there racism? Sexism? Ability-ism? Do I think in terms of “What’s best for me?” or “What’s best for everyone”?
- What does **justice** look like? Do certain people, organizations, or interest groups have more influence than others? Do certain people have LESS of a voice than others?
- How can we, as a society, provide the best care for those who are most **vulnerable**? Who advocates for those who have less influence? Who presents a vision where folks like Legion find the compassion, help, support, and love?
- Who models **integrity**? Who is actively shows they are trustworthy? Who is honest? It’s too easy to get cynical. Or up on idealism. Let’s live with integrity and the highest of ideals ourselves. And call for the same from those who would govern us.

As we muddle through 2022, remember the words of Jan Hus, *“Dear Faithful Christian ... search for Truth, hear Truth, learn Truth, love Truth, speak the Truth, hold the Truth, and defend the Truth ‘til death.”* If we take that seriously, we will need to read Scripture, pray, and think – deeply. It will be hard work. There are no easy answers.

As Canadians, we love our country. Like John Diefenbaker and Tommy Douglas, we can have different politics. That’s OK.

More importantly, as Kingdom of God people, we love Jesus, first and foremost. We are united in Him. Together, we love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, AND we love our neighbour as ourselves. Like Diefenbaker and Douglas, we search for (God’s) Truth, love Truth, speak the Truth, hold the Truth, and defend the Truth, by trying to live out our Christian faith and do what is right in all things.