

## **The Kingdom of Heaven Has Come**

What does Jesus mean when he says in this week's gospel text that "The kingdom of heaven has come near"? (Matt. 4:17). Growing up in an apocalyptic sect, I thought I knew: He means the world government of his millennial reign is about to start. I never quite sorted out how the kingdom of which Jesus spoke could be 2,000 (or more) years away from his statement about it and yet also somehow be "near." All I knew is that I was living in the end-times and Jesus was talking about my time—not his own.

Step 1, I would say, is to really get a handle on what the "kingdom of heaven" must be. Regardless of what it might mean for the earth, now or in the future, it is first of all "of heaven." That is to say, it is the rule and order of heavenly life. It is God's life. And what is God's life? His life is the Father loving the Son in the love of the Holy Spirit. So the Kingdom of Heaven is the Life of the Trinity.

Step 2 is to realize that Jesus says it "has come near." Not "will" come near or is "about to be seen." If the Kingdom of Heaven is the Triune Life and it "has come," then Jesus must be talking about himself because he is the one that "has come."

Step 3, then, is to embrace Jesus. He is the Kingdom of Heaven come near, he is the Triune Life grounded in human nature and drawn near to our suffering. He is The Epiphanal Light shining in the darkness.

*~ Jonathan Stepp*