

Dot-to-Dot
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Remember when you were a kid and you had a dot-to-dot book. It was full of seemingly empty pages - at least empty of lines to color inside of. Instead there were numerous black small circles waiting for your pencil. The dots were numbered and if you followed them in order, voila, a picture would slowly appear. You might have guessed before the last number, but if the dot-to-dot book was advanced, sometimes you couldn't really be sure of the picture until the final connecting stroke.

Okay, grab a pencil. Well, not a real pencil but a mental pencil. We need a mental pencil because I want to talk about the kingdom of God. Jesus mentions it in the first line of the Beatitudes and to talk about the kingdom of God, we have to connect dots. I think the picture of the kingdom of God is a complicated and advanced dot-to-dot exercise.

But, not because Jesus didn't give us dots. He did. And we even know dot numbered "1". In three of the gospels, Jesus starts his public ministry announcing dot #1: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." But after the first dot, Jesus doesn't number them. Or maybe we just have a hard time following them. Maybe the problem is that we think we know what the picture is going to be so we can't connect Jesus' kingdom of God dots very well. Certainly the first disciples have that problem.

As good Jews, they are already familiar with the term "the kingdom of God". It's an ancient Hebrew idea with two different meanings. On one hand, it meant a place or land without foreign oppression - something the Hebrew people continually hope for - up to this day. Or the other, the kingdom of God wasn't a geographical term, but referred to flesh and blood as in faithfulness to the laws. So the first disciples probably think they know what Jesus' good news is - and they guess wrong on both counts. Jesus is not announcing a land without the Romans or any other oppressors. Nor is Jesus announcing an adherence to moral and dietary regulations. Nope, Jesus said, "you're imagining the wrong picture with my dots." Like many Hebrew traditions and scripture passages, Jesus turns this one on its head. The kingdom of God Jesus announces isn't even of this world. The path there isn't paved with good works, virtuous living, church attendance. In fact, the kingdom of God is not a place we go to and strive for, a kind of earthly utopia. Nor is it a "place" we go to after we die.

Let's follow his dots. But I warn you. They aren't numbered and there doesn't seem to be any order. They are scattered throughout his ministry. There is no connecting line except himself. Still, Jesus alerts when a dot is coming: "The kingdom of God is like... ". With each one, he gives us a chance to complete a truer picture of what the kingdom of God is according to Jesus.

- One dot suggests an eye of a needle and to imagine a camel trying to get through. Impossible unless the life load is lightened.
- Another dot for the kingdom is a seed in the ground. It's beneath the surface. It's not immediately obvious . Yet, when nurtured and allowed to grow, what starts small, like a mustard seed, surprisingly grows into a large tree, able to embrace all.

- Imagine finding a treasure in a field and going to buy that field. Possessing that treasure is worth every cost for with that treasure comes deep, abiding joy. So, discovering the kingdom of God requires intentional action.
- The kingdom of God is more than just valuable - it is abundance. It's a net casted into the depths. Yet, over time, the harvest can be seen by others, a harvest beyond expectation and straining our capacity to explain.
- It is like yeast in cups of flour. It only takes a few tiny sprinkles folded inside, allowed to rest, to become life, daily bread for many.
- Even more amazing, the kingdom of God Jesus describes is free - free for all. You can't earn it or get from someone else. As he says, "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you." (Luke 11:9-10).

By connecting Jesus' dots, we see the kingdom of God is deep, beneath the surface, as with seed, fish, and treasure. Jesus points to abundance - a net filled with fish or yeast increasing the life and nourishment of flour. And it's free: only ask, seek, knock.

Now do you recognize the picture, the place of the kingdom of God? Not quite? Well, Jesus gives us the final dot to complete the dot-to-dot picture. With it, he confirms where we find the open door to the kingdom of God. "Once Jesus was asked... when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God does not come with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' Or 'There it is!' For, in fact the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)

Now the all dots are connected and the picture of the Kingdom of God is complete. Now, the dots have made a picture each of you can recognize because it's a picture of you. Each of us has the place in the deep, hidden place at our center where God reigns. The kingdom of God is not a place we die into but a place where we live with abundant joy, freedom, openness, gentleness, loving relationships, the ability to give and receive, in unity and peace. From that place, we will truly discover and trust that the "all these things will be added unto you." So it's really not a picture, but the life Jesus offers us. Amen.