Brian McLaren has reflected on the Kingdom of God and its implications for a broader understanding of mission in all of life. In *The Secret Message of Jesus*, he attempts to dig beneath the surface to uncover Jesus’ message, grapple with its meaning and explore how it could change everything. As he explains, the message of Jesus in the context of his day was political and revolutionary. Today it is still radical, surprising, unexpected and counter-intuitive. It calls people to care for the poor, look for creative alternatives to violence and war, express faith with inward sincerity and not just outward conformity, and get ready for a new world order.

Salvation, for McLaren, is not an exit ramp after you die but a thrusting back into being part of God’s dream for this earth (p.183). McLaren questions the narrow definition of the gospel as getting people to heaven when they die rather than helping people do God’s will on earth before they die: ‘We may have pressured people to be moral and good or correct and orthodox to avoid hell after death, but we didn’t inspire them with the possibility of becoming beautiful and fruitful to heal the earth in this life’ (p.84).

He says the invitation of the Kingdom is to make beautiful music of life – with smile and laughter, food and drink, time and space (p.77). This is the role not just of professional ministers but all of God’s people. McLaren queries: ‘What if the real difference is made in the world not by us preachers but by those who endure our preaching, those who quietly live out the secret message of the kingdom of God in their daily, workaday lives in the laboratory, classroom, office, cockpit, parliament, kitchen, market, factory, and neighborhood’ (p.82). Helping all different spheres become places where God’s dreams come true is the focus of the Kingdom of God. Or if other complementary metaphors are preferred, it is about the global economy of God, the dream of God, the revolution of God, the mission of God, the party of God, the network of God, the dance of God, the inclusive tribe of God, the story of God, the table of God or counter-insurgency of God.

I like McLaren’s balance of critical reading and evangelical faith. The book is worth buying just for the thoughtful appendices – on why it has taken the church so long to grasp the message of the Kingdom, and practical suggestions for missional communities to have conversations, experiments and acts of service in response to the book. But its best contribution, in my view, is its encouragement and affirmation of the role of all believers in working with God in bringing in the Kingdom.

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