

“Your Kingdom Come – Now!”

August 14, 2016

Starting Over, Digging Deeper series

There are many times when I find myself praying for Jesus to come again - to show up, put the world right, and usher in the new heaven and new earth. There are times when I just want God to fix what’s broken because I know that none of us can do it. Sometimes I swerve toward a place of hopelessness. Ultimately it’s up to God to figure out how to end all of this violence, heartbreak, and tragedy.

And yet if I take Jesus’ words seriously, it’s not just about God doing the work. As much as I might want to give it all over to God, I have a responsibility. The Kingdom of God isn’t just about the glory of heaven; it’s about those moments when we experience the clash of heaven and earth coming together in amazing ways. It’s like that image of the two circles overlapping – and the place where they meet in the middle.

I experienced that at Unity Christian Music Festival. Thousands of people gathered together - some to praise God, some to enjoy a concert, perhaps some checking out a Christian concert for the first time. But my hope is that whatever the reason people were there, they experienced a sacred moment when heaven and earth came together - when they felt something powerful and meaningful.

Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God more than anything else in the Gospels. And still it’s difficult to grasp. How would you explain the Kingdom of God if someone asked you?

Let’s say that the Kingdom is where and how God is present in our lives. Jesus gives us a better, clearer picture. He wants us to grasp what we’re doing here on earth. Even here we’re part of God’s Kingdom.

Jesus spoke in parables a lot - stories that offered a new way of understanding the bigger picture. God’s Kingdom isn’t necessarily a place we can go. It’s not really tangible; we can’t touch it and keep it. But Jesus says that we’re part it. And by God’s grace, we can participate in it with God. Best of all, we experience it when we walk with him.

Jesus takes what would be very familiar images for the people of his day – like a tree and a batch of dough – to explain the Kingdom of God. It all starts with a small seed and a little bit of leaven. But even in something so simple, there’s a catch. There’s the mystery of how a tree grows from a single, tiny seed. There’s the fascinating fact that just a bit of leaven can change a big lump of dough.

Jesus calls us to recognize our importance to the Kingdom of God. Certainly it’s God’s Kingdom, and our loyalty to God is vital. The Gospel writers had big dreams for

what the church could and should be – visions of growth and success. But there's more to what Jesus says here than the church being triumphant and great. Jesus calls us to grow – in our personal faith and together as a faith community.

Jesus' images also challenge us to see ourselves as vital to the Kingdom of God. God needs you and me to help others see how and where God is present. Nothing we do for God is insignificant. We're partners with God in making love real and accessible.

The most damaging thing we do is to underestimate the power and call that God gives us. I'll confess that I've felt that way before – questioning whether my service to God matters at all. Does it make a difference? Look around – ministries are performed for the good of God's people every day, yet I hear people struggle with whether they're doing any good, whether they're worthy to serve, whether any of it matters. Jesus says, "Yes!"

Jesus says that the Kingdom of God is almost unassuming, almost too small to be seen. But it's always there with a power that cannot be denied. Even though Israel considered itself a strong, cedar tree and powerful among nations, Jesus offers the image of a seed – a not-so-glorious field plant that spreads like a weed. The seed became a tree for many birds to find shelter and protection.

And leaven was an interesting image for Jesus to use. Leaven isn't really yeast as we think of it, but rather a piece of old bread used to work into new dough to make it rise. Normally, leaven was a symbol of something unclean or corrupt. The interesting thing is that Jesus says that the woman tries to hide the leaven in 50 pounds of flour! Have you ever baked bread? Have you ever started with 50 pounds of flour? Jesus says that even a small amount of leaven will change the whole batch!

Jesus challenges us: to be alive with faith and hope for what God can do in our midst, however unbelievable and impossible it sounds. To do what we can with what God has given – prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness – to make God's love visible and real wherever we can.

God is in charge, even as we serve and work for the Kingdom of God on earth. Think of the Lord's Prayer. We say it together when we worship: "Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." The prayer that Jesus offered to us invites us to work for the Kingdom of God on earth - not just sit and wait for heaven. So, how do we work for peace, joy, hope, forgiveness, reconciliation, faith, love?

I've heard it said that the Kingdom of God is already here, but not yet here. Yes, that's a paradox, but it makes sense if we break it down. I know that Kingdom of God isn't fully realized, yet there are times when I've been so moved and sure of God's presence and of what God is doing in the world. I see hope and love in a new way. I

witness people coming together. I understand the power of forgiveness. I celebrate God's goodness.

Jesus invites us to look for the Kingdom of God in places that we assume it never would be. My prayer is that the invitation to share your God moments helps all of us to experience God's grace in new ways. I hope that all of us are watching, waiting, and anticipating God moments in our lives. We see God's Kingdom in the church, but it's not limited to the church. God is at work in the expected and in those places and people we might write them off. But the Good News is that God doesn't ever stop working in our lives and in the world.

The Kingdom of God drives us to hope. To have hope, we have to know that we don't have absolute power. We have to believe that God has power to change hearts and lives. We have to believe in God's love more powerful than our sin. And we also believe that God can use people - people like you and me, and people who are not like you and me. You probably have a story about how God has surprised you once or twice by working through or speaking through or coming through in an unexpected way.

We have too many reasons not to hope at all: war, famine, suffering, abuse, addiction, broken relationships, hate, and fear. So what compels us to hope? I offer you some words from our United Methodist Church website:

"Christian faith is, in part, a matter of hoping. We believe in and trust the Lord of the future, and we lean into the future that God has promised. God goes before us, beckoning us into the new world that is already being created, calling us to join in the challenging work of fashioning it.

Yet our hope is not in trends. Our hope is in the Lord of all creation and all history -- a God who is still in charge and is actively at work transforming the world."

Great things come from the most humble beginnings, from the smallest acts of goodness, from the tiniest bits of good intention, from jobs of service that work together to accomplish good work. And God works in all of it to bring hope.

"Day after day, we see deeds of Christian courage, of compassion and reconciliation, of integrity in the face of temptation, and of witness for truth and justice."

We don't sit back and simply wait for the Kingdom of God. We pray for it - seek it first - watch for it and call it out, live into it, work for it, and witness to it. Jesus' purpose wasn't simply to tell us about eternal life, but to tell us that the Kingdom of Heaven is here and now.

And when we say "yes," we're saying yes to Jesus as Lord, his love as goal. May we say "yes" to Jesus - and "yes" to the Kingdom of God.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.