

1 March 8, 2009 – 2 Lent
Lenten Journey – *Your kingdom come*
Rev. Dr. Michael Bradburn

Isaiah 25:6-9

Psalm 33:1-5

2 Corinthians 8:13-15

Luke 17:20-26

Jesus says the kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed – nor will they say, ‘Look here,’ or ‘here it is,’ or ‘there it is.’ The kingdom of God is already within you. For me this quest to discover God’s love within starts with an inward journey. Time passes quickly in our lives, but what is important is not the passing of time. You don’t simply gain knowledge and wisdom by the passing years but it’s important to have self-reflection – the deliberate and sometimes difficult journey inside to find the gold.

Going inside and finding the kingdom of God that is already within us can be scary, especially when we’re used to getting feedback from the outside, not from the inside out. Jesus’ disciples struggled with this also, this wanting outward affirmation as opposed to inward peace. And most of us have learned to rely on feedback from others to get a gauge of how we are doing, of where we stand in life.

I think of an example from my own life that my brother still teases about. The setting is the football field. Sometimes after a game where I made a touchdown I would ask him, “How did I look?” I longed to hear, “You were great. You were awesome. You looked like a star. You are a star because of this accomplishment.” My question was spawned by insecurity. Am I, by my accomplishments, great?

Jesus’ disciples wanted to know who was the greatest among them. They wanted to know if they were great. They asked him, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And he answered them, “Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble, like this child, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of God is a relationship between God and us in which we acknowledge our dependence upon God, like children acknowledging and knowing that their parents are in charge. So part of the inward journey, part of living more fully as God’s children, of recognizing the kingdom of God that is already inside of us, has to do with trust, learning to trust, and to not rely solely on our own strengths, cleverness, and determination, but instead the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me for it is such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.”

So one of the other things that prevents us from living out of a place of acknowledging this God within, is that we have a lot of anxiety, we worry a lot. You might say, sure it's fine to be a naive child, but I live in the real world. I hear you. However, when we pray trusting as a child trusts a parent, when we pray your kingdom come, we find a way out of this worry, this worry that holds us back.

Jesus understands our worries and exhibits a deep understanding of human anxiety. In one of his sermons he talks about worrying, worrying about what we will drink, what we will eat, what we will wear. This metaphor represents the many fears, anxieties, desires, cares, and distractions that constantly consume our days. And he asks, "Is life not more than food, and the body more than clothing?" We learn that the answer is yes, and we access, from deep inside of us, the kingdom of God. Jesus encourages us to trust God, which makes our worries drift away.

When I find myself deeply centered, connected to God, this God within, I am able to trust God. I'm not driven by anxiety or analytical or strategic thinking, but pure childlike trust. Being in touch with the kingdom of God inside of us feels peaceful, like a child feels when he or she is held by a loving parent.

Let's talk about love for a moment. When we pray for "God's kingdom come," we're praying for love to come.. Jesus was talking to people who believed that God's kingdom would come through violence against those who were opposed to God's kingdom.

There are even teachings to this effect. But Jesus says, "You have heard you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, behaving like the Father" – like Father, like child.

So the way of God is the way of love. The rule of God is the rule of love. Jesus was once asked by an expert of the law which commandment was the most important. And the reply was, "First to love God; and second to love your neighbor as yourself." This expert agrees with his answer and then Jesus says, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." He may have gotten the answer right, but Jesus says he's not far from the kingdom of God. Not far, why not in? The answer: There's a difference between knowing the right words to say, and living out those words. There's a difference between talking about love and loving. That's the distance between not far and in.

In closing I'd like to lift up two suggestions from *Book of Faith – Lenten Journey*. First, after the service, I encourage you to seek out someone, here at church or in your family, or someplace else, someone who has hurt you. I'd like you to think about someone who you're in conflict with. I want you to seek them out, have a conversation with them. To help you do that, I would like to have us pray now for a moment, so, if you would be so kind as to close your eyes, I'd like us to pray.

Close your eyes and think of someone you are having a rough time with, someone you are in conflict with, someone who has hurt you, even someone who is your enemy. And, as you close your eyes and pray, I encourage you to silently pray for this person now.

When we pray for our enemies, or those who have hurt us, we are living out of a deep sense of the kingdom of God which is in us. It has to do with love. The kingdom of God is within you. Amen.