

Exekiel 34: 11-16, 20-24
Psalm 100
Ephesians 1: 15-23
Matthew 25: 31-46

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THY KINGDOM COME

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. AMEN

Good Morning. Once again, we're all virtual, the sanctuary is empty, except for the few of us making this service happen. It is so achingly different not to have Kiaran, our sacred dinosaur, stalking down the center aisle like he did last Sunday with a low roar, determined to scare us all before his mother came running to corral him back to the pew.

But we're not together because an American is dying every minute. Every minute from a raging pandemic that has exploded out of control. It is hard to comprehend, unless someone you love, is in a minute, gone.

To stay safe, to be our brothers' and sisters' keepers, we once again, have to stay apart which is hard, disappointing, and sad as the holidays draw near.

So where is the Kingdom of God? Today we celebrate Christ the King, a relatively new feast day started by the Pope Pius XI I 1925, after the First World War, to help heal a world bitter, broken, and divided and to counter a fear of rising authoritarianism. What does the kingdom of Christ mean, in these unstable, unsettled, and frightening times?

It means what is always has for two thousand years. The Kingdom is here. It's now and always attainable "...on earth as it is in heaven..." when we align our hearts with Jesus, who taught us to pray for its realization the night before he died and for two millennium, we have.

God's kingdom. Here on earth. No angels and harps or whatever you might imagine the afterlife to be—some Disneyland of delight— Jesus was praying to spark a transformation in our hearts, all our hearts, that would create God's Beloved Community.

Father Richard Rohr, an author and Franciscan friar and founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico wrote in one of his free daily emails which I highly recommend:

"The Kingdom is about union and communion, which means that it is also about mercy, forgiveness, nonviolence, letting go, solidarity, service, and lives of love, patience, and simplicity. Who can doubt that this is the sum and substance of Jesus' teaching? In the Reign of

God, the very motive for rivalry, greed, and violence has been destroyed. We know we are all part of God's Beloved Community."

Author, activist, and community organizer Lisa Sharon Harper describes it in this way:

"Evidence of the presence of the Kingdom of God is thick wherever and whenever people stand on the promise of God that there is more to this world—more to this life—than what we see. There is more than the getting over, getting by, or getting mine. There is more than the brokenness, the destruction, and the despair that threaten to wash over us like the waters of the deep. There is a vision of a world where God cuts through the chaos, where God speaks and there is light. There is a vision where there is protection and where love is binding every relationship together."

These times are stark and disturbing different, yet our absence from each other in a way confirms, the kingdom of God. We are together because our hearts are united in the community of St. Peter's. Our spirit is strong and unbroken despite being separated because it is enhanced, not defined, by physical presence but by the alignment of our hearts, just as Christ's presence is alive among us, and lives within each of us.

Our explicit and powerful gospel this morning defines the kingdom of heaven in a sentence:

"Whatever you do to the least of these, you do unto me."

How we care for each other—which is of course defined by the choices our hearts make—is how we lay claim to being followers of Jesus and how we realize God's kingdom on earth.

It is our hearts that determine our values, our leaders, our nation and our fates. Jesus never sought to impose imperial rule he *challenged* the oppressive Roman Empire without one weapon or one soldier, just a rag tag group of disciples and the love of God.

We are now living in a threshold time, as an old order gives way to a new come January 20th.

Never has our nation felt more polarized and divided. Never has our democracy—which is, after all, only an idea—felt more fragile.

Which makes realizing God's kingdom even more imperative-- Now or never--- thankfully still feels hyperbolic, but, not all that much.

Here's the good news. You can start realizing the kingdom of God wherever you are, with whatever you have, because it's enough.

Think of a person who inspires you – here on earth— as someone who bears witness to God's kingdom in their daily lives.

For me, that's my brother, Mark, whom many of you have met. The world sees him as someone with "special needs" which I finally realized is exactly backwards because it is I who have special need of him.

Mark is unfailingly kind, generous, and compassionate, always helpful and giving not from his wealth or possessions, but from his heart.

Over and over again, he makes me realize how small and shut down my heart can become as he stops to talk to strangers, gives money to anyone who reaches out a hand, and makes the best of whatever might come his way. He's content with what he has, especially if it involves fishing, pizza, or Starbuck's, and doesn't load up the future with his expectations of how things should be in an ego driven way.

Although he did ask me a few months to tell Emily he wants to light the candles when he comes back to St. Peter's.

Last year I picked him up at the airport in December and we came straight here, arriving about half an hour before the start of the Christmas pageant. Within ten minutes, maybe 15, he was a villager with a costume and shepherd's crook and was into the swing of things, just as he loves to be.

My brother's life is an invitation to the world to be kind. And St. Peter's has embraced him with arms and hearts wide open.

That's the kingdom we pray to have come, over and over and over again. And it's here, at St. Peter's, in our hearts, in our love, and in our faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

And all we have to do is keep giving it away. AMEN