

“The Kingdom of God: Transformation of Yourself and the World”

Psalms 105:1-11, 45, Mark 4:26-28, Matthew 13:31-32

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What was Jesus’ primary message? The answer is simple and clear: **The Kingdom of God**. You may think of different words in your mind like love, grace, and church. These are ways to accomplish Jesus’ final goal. The dominant theme in the Gospels, Jesus’ whole ministry and his whole life’s work are focused on the Kingdom of God. We often sing a hymn, “Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God.” What does it REALLY mean? Why is this so important? This morning, I want to talk about the deeper meaning of God’s Kingdom.

I want to clarify two things with you about the term, *the Kingdom of God* so that you won’t be confused. When Jesus envisioned the Kingdom of God, it wasn’t just God and the *kingship of God (the ruling activity)*, but he emphasized God’s people that are part of the Kingdom. Jesus dedicated his whole life to proclaim and to bring forth the Kingdom of God on earth, where everyone is equally accepted, cared and loved by the grace of God. There are no more chosen race, class, and gender under God. For Jesus, the Kingdom of God is a new understanding of *kinship of God (God’s family)*. The other is about the location. Where is the Kingdom of God? Jesus never mentioned a physical place for God’s Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is not a territory but a place where God reigns. The reign of God takes place where God’s love touches people’s hearts to be transformed into living a holy life serving and loving our neighbors and others.

I want to be clear about our purpose of Christian faith: **The purpose of our Christian life is to be more like Jesus and the vision of Church is to bring forth God’s Kingdom among us**. Becoming a Christian is not our final stage, but a new beginning in our spiritual journey. Once we experience God’s justifying grace, we are invited to live a holy life. It is about spiritual maturity (sanctification). Methodism theology calls this God’s sanctifying grace. John Wesley describes this as “going to perfection” in keeping with Christ’s command to “be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). We may not become ‘perfect Christian’ during our life, but we do our best to make progress as individuals and churches to be more like Jesus by the grace of God. Individual spiritual maturity and social transformation of the world are Christian’s ultimate concern and mission to seek the Kingdom of God on earth. God’s grace is constantly working in us to help transform our minds and lives.

Jesus' ministry is all about changing hearts. He compared the Kingdom of God to a small seed. The key understanding of Jesus' parable is growth and transformation. Our United Methodist Church's motto is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Transformation is an expression of the Kingdom of God. Let's revisit our Scripture readings. In our first Old Testament reading, there were two important words: chosen ones and covenant. The Old Testament era can be summarized into this: God's covenant with His chosen people. Covenant means promise: God's promise for His people and Israelites' promise for faithful obedience to their God. Judaism urges people to keep Moses' law to maintain the relationship with God.

In the Gospels, both of Mark and Matthew use an example of seed. Why do they use an image of seed? First of all, seeds are small, and often buried or overlooked, but they matter to God. The little seeds grow day by day, year by year, as Jesus says, it will become great. The tiny little seed grows into the greatest of all shrubs with its large branches and birds can nest in its shade. Let's just imagine who were socially and economically regarded as small and tiny ones in Jesus' time? Jewish religious leaders were considered as big ones, but Jesus' followers and friends were often overlooked by the society. Jesus proclaimed that no one is small before God. Whoever you are, you are specially chosen and planted in the ground of God's love and grow in Jesus Christ until you become a big tree. We are all called to grow and to become a great one in our journey. A small seed can be our individual faith-growing process towards spiritual maturity. As the mustard seed has grown to be the greatest shrub and a tree for the birds' nests, our spiritual maturity requires us to live a holy life. The goal of Christianity is to love God so completely and love our neighbors as ourselves so fully that everything we think, say and do is motivated by love. By the grace of God, we are transformed into the image of Christ. This is what spiritual maturity, sanctification and what Christian perfection means to us.

What about our church? Do not assume that church is the Kingdom of God. Church is not made up of fully sanctified persons who have achieved spiritual maturity and can call themselves perfect. Rather, the church is a body of people who have committed to journeying towards holiness. Bishop Scott J. Jones in his book, *The Wesleyan Way*, describes church as an image of recovery group, made up of people who have named their problems and are helping each other toward the goal of a sanctified life. Part of that help comes in teaching what God expects, so we are all clear on the goal. Part of that help comes in encouragement from those farther along the path, saying to beginners, "You can do it!" Part of that help comes because Christ has promised to be present through the means of grace, which the church provides.

Charles Wesley wrote a powerful hymn about our responsibility to participate in God's saving activity in the world. Listen to his confession:

I have one purpose to fulfill:
to bring glory to the God I love,
My never-dying soul is saved for eternity
and is being prepared even now for heaven.

My calling here on earth
is to serve with all I am -
my talents, my skills, my mind, my heart, my passion -
give it all to the will of God.

Help me, Lord, to take great care,
as I live my life for your pleasure,
I want to serve you, Lord.
May I leave a legacy of faithfulness to you.

Teach me, Lord, to look only to you,
to pray, to rely on you.
I know and am sure
that without you I would die. (Contemporary Rephrasing)

We are all God's small seeds that sprout, grow and journey through our spiritual life together. Jesus calls us to participate in expanding God's Kingdom. I pray that your faith journey continues to grow towards spiritual maturity. And I also hope our Fair Oaks church continues to grow in Jesus Christ doing good works for our community. This is what Jesus expects us to do and to be part of God's Kingdom. As Charles Wesley confessed his calling for the will of God, I pray your calling also here on earth is to serve with all you are - your talents, your skills, your mind, your heart, your passion - give it all to the will of God. This is all about the Kingdom of God. Amen.