

February 17, 2019

Luke 6:17-26

When the Worship Team first looked at today's Gospel lesson, I (proudly) pointed out that using inclusive language one no longer uses the term "Kingdom of God". I prefer Reign of God. While everybody around that table was in favor of the use of inclusive language, when talking about God and people, there was some rumbling about how archaic, non-21st century the phrase was, both "Reign" and "Kingdom of God". It was pointed out we live in a constitutional democracy, not under a monarch. Who today, it was asked, can relate to a kingdom or a reign? Of God or otherwise!

I have to be honest with you here: I bristled a bit upon hearing this line of questioning. It was putting my cherished theological understanding of God's sovereignty in question. I pointed out to the Team, as I am pointing out to you right now, when I speak of the reign of God, I am talking about putting ourselves under the authority of God; that God is, indeed, to be our sovereign. As I have often said, all too often my sovereign is money, the desire to have, to acquire "things". It seems to rule my life. A lot of my time is spent on thinking about and wishing for things I don't yet have. When Jesus talks about God as Ruler, he is wanting us to replace our love of, and sovereignty to, money, and our wanting of things, with God; making God our object of desire.

As I wrestled with this critic, especially my desire to hold onto my old understandings, I began to see two problems emerging. How does one go about making

something as amorphous, as intangible as God an "object of desire"? The other problem had to do with the difference between "reign" and "kingdom". While the word reign does allow for an inclusive concept of a sovereign, it lacks a feeling for having a geographical location. When we speak of kingdom, it implies a realm, as well as a sovereignty.

What initially took us down this contentious path was my belief that people were very surprised by whom Jesus seemed to include as part of God's reign, realm, or kingdom (for the moment, you can pick which word suits you best). They were the poor, the hungry, the mourners, the outcasts; they were, in fact, all the people conventional wisdom would tell you were outside of God's favor. It was a group of people whose life circumstances blared out "blackballed by God!"

There is no doubt in my mind that much of what got Jesus into hot water with the local authorities was who he was spending time with and how he welcomed them. He was challenging conventional wisdom of what was acceptable and honorable. To bring it up to almost our day and age, Jesus was inviting a black man to drink from a whites only water fountain. It was not done in this country 50 years ago, and it certainly wasn't done in Jesus' day.

How then are we to understand the "reign of God" or the "kingdom of God" today?

Foundational are two things: God is sovereign and God's reign or kingdom, geographically, is right here and right now.

As I pondered and studied how best to build on this foundation an understanding of God's "kingdom" or "reign", I was reminded of a new word I had been seeing in visits to colleagues and when reading newer theological concepts: kin-dom. One simply replaces the "g" with a "dash" and you come up with a word that is really self-explanatory. It seems the Latina feminist theologian, Dr. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, heard this word spoken by a friend and gave it a wider audience through her books and other writings.

The more I dwell on this word – kin-dom – the more powerful it becomes. When I think about my family, not just my brothers or my mother, but my extended family, which also includes Barbara's family, I feel a special bond, even against my best wishes, for those I vehemently disagree with. I might not like their political or social opinions, but they are nonetheless family.

Now, I know that is not true for everybody. There are good reasons why one holds a grudge or dislikes a family member or even disowns one, but historically the first human communities grew up around families; belonging was based on kinship. Like them or not, they are family.

Now, expand that kind of kinship to include all humanity; in fact; expand it to include all of creation. How differently would we live our lives, if we

intentionally lived into the kinship of the neighbor we dislike the most. Who wouldn't take in their father or mother, sister or brother, if they could not care for themselves?

Jesus challenged the crowds who came to hear him, just as he challenges us today: The world around you – the lost, the hungry, the mourner, the outcast, and even the ones casting others out – they are the "kin-dom of God"; this is the world around us to whom we are related, with whom we share a kinship.

You don't need me to spell this out for you. If you really take time to reflect on this idea, this Kin-dom of God idea, you will find it fascinating and probably a little repelling, maybe a lot repelling. Jesus' teachings often have that effect on people.

The more I have spent time trying to envision the embodiment of the "Kin-dom of God", the more I see it aligning with the message Jesus was sharing. We are to care for one another, and for all creation, as we would care for our mother or our brother.

As we now prepare to move into Centering Prayer, I would encourage you to spend some of your prayer time reflecting on how you understand "Kin-dom". And then, when we turn to The Lord's Prayer, I encourage you use the words in the bulletin, which are very slightly altered.

I hope it will both surprise you and bring you closer to the kin-dom of God.

Amen.