

Wednesday, July 8, 2020

**A kingdom of love and justice**

**- Pastor Hank French**

*Your kingdom come... (Matthew 6:10).*

*Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among [and within] you"* (Luke 17:20-21).

Today we will think about something that Jesus seemed to think about most—the kingdom of God. In the gospels, the word kingdom appears some 123 times; Jesus uses the word 98 times. It is at the heart of his message. Mark—the earliest of all the gospels—records the beginning of Jesus' ministry this way: "Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news'" (Mark 1:14-15).

And the "good news," of course, is that the kingdom is for everyone. The only ones excluded are those who exclude themselves, those who—for one reason or another—do not want to live under the rule of God.

Which brings us to a paradox: the kingdom both is and is not. It has begun in the life of Jesus, and it continues to spread in and through the lives of people who follow Jesus—but it has not yet come in its fullness and completeness. The world is still mostly a mess. All creation does not yet live under the rule of God. When we pray "your kingdom come," we are praying for *God* to make his rule complete, we are praying for God to clean up the mess we have made. But, we are also praying that God's kingdom would come to and through us; we are praying that we would live faithfully under God's rule, that we would be part of the clean-up team.

Even a quick reading of the Gospels is enough to show that the kingdom of God, the rule of God, is the rule of love and justice. The rule of God is the rule of compassion and mercy, the rule of forgiveness. The rule of God is the rule of equity, of dignity, of peace and prosperity for all—not for the few at the expense of the many, but for all. The rule of God, in short, is the rule of life—fullness and richness of life for everyone. That's what we ask God to make happen when we pray "your kingdom come." And we also ask for the grace to help make it happen.

When we pray for the kingdom to come we are, in a profound way, praying for love to come. Jesus rejected the then popular notion that God's kingdom would come through violence against those opposed to the coming of the kingdom. At one point, he told his followers: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven... (Matthew 5:43-45). Like Father, like child—or so it is supposed to be.

Prayer: God of love, today I will seek to follow the way of love in all my relationships, trusting in your Spirit to guide my way. Amen.