

Citizens of the Kingdom of God “Thy Kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Dear Friends,

I am truly lamenting that as I will be at Diocesan Convention, I will not be with all of you on Sunday after such an important week on our lives. I will be away, but I wanted to leave you with this message—a Part II, perhaps, of my sermon last Sunday in which I asked us to be a witness in our community of how to rise above the party politic and remember that we are first citizens of the Kingdom of God and then citizens of the United States.

Right now I am trying to envision the world we live as being surrounded and saturated with the love of God. Imagine all wars and divisions ceasing. Think of a world where no one—not one single person is hungry or starving. Can you envision a place where no one steals, lies, cheats, or murders another? What about a world where children, women, black and brown people, and all other victims of hate groups or violence are protected and safe? Imagine a world where the strongest among us work hard for those who are most vulnerable.

This world is the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is not a place, of course, but it is instead an in-breaking of God’s will and God’s way into our present reality. The Kingdom of God cannot be confined to the institutional Church—it is a far greater gift to the world than that. The life-giving power of God resists such confinement by institutions or particular communities...or for individual theologies for that matter.

Nor is the kingdom of God simply an experience of the “heart.” In our scripture, the kingdom is the liberating activity of God in the world and history; the kingdom is too expansive to reside only in the heart although it also exist within each and every one of us.

The word “Kingdom” in the phrase “kingdom of heaven” is a noun; it denotes action just like the word “love” in the phrase “love of God.” Just as God’s love means God acting in love for others, so also God’s kingdom means God’s active will coming to pass in all of creation. The kingdom of God is not an abstract idea in and of itself, but it is God’s activity revealed to the world in acts of love, mercy, reconciliation and justice. Jesus tells us that in fact the Kingdom has come, but that the fullness of Kingdom has not yet been realized. Jesus, through his life and actions, inaugurated the advent of God’s will being visible on earth.

When we observe Jesus to unlock this mystery, we see God’s will is found at work in acts of healing, inclusion, mercy and grace each and every day. When those who follow him enact these same values, this is the Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

Every time a prejudice is overcome or an oppressive power is overturned—God’s kingdom is at work! When a child is rescued from poverty or an abused wife finds refuge and hope for a new life—whenever justice prevails and barriers are torn down and our love for diversity increases ---this is God’s will set loose upon the world!

Anytime humankind acts in concert with God’s purposes we are living life in the heart of the Kingdom of God. And here is the miracle...we, meaning you and me, and especially all of us gathered together as the Body of Christ, we can create the Kingdom of God come among us at will. We have the power to actively re-create the world as a safer, more just place for the most vulnerable among us—just as Jesus did.

This week we witnessed one of the most divisive, political elections in modern history. In a country that likes to create categories of winners and losers, if we are not careful, we are in danger of splitting apart right down the middle. This is true in our communities, our families and our churches.

As a pastor, I want to note that we are a community of diverse viewpoints, and this is good. The church I have given my life to is the church that is radically welcome to all persons. Also as a priest, I do not believe that God wills the winner in any election--no matter who wins or loses. We see this idea in the Old Testament, but Jesus tells us God is not interested in that thinking.

God is not a Democrat or a Republican and the people of America, not God, pick their leaders. This is where Free Will rules the day and God seems okay with letting us rise or fall by our own choices.

But, where I do believe God's will collides with this intersection of human activity is in calling us to reconciliation and unity whenever and wherever we are most divided. As I said in my sermon on Sunday, we must learn and/or remember to love God more than a political party or political candidate. And then--act out of that love.

God's love comes to us in an extravagant, never ending flow of mercy and compassion. Following the will of God is doing what the prophet Micah exhorted all those years ago: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8). It's just not as easy as it sounds!

But, Jesus shows us what this looks like in action and he asks us pick up our courage and follow him into those dark and dangerous places where we fear or hate one another the most-- and then, as hard as it might be, see God in the face of the other and extend ourselves in love.

This is our deepest call in these current days—to work and pray to see God in one another and reach out in love. Whether you feel like a loser or a winner following the events of Tuesday, reach out, pray for all, be gracious in victory and magnanimous in defeat. Do something kind for someone that thinks differently than you and train your hearts and minds to see God's goodness in another without regard to labels that can only divide.

Serious issues divide our country and none of what I write promises quick answers to complex problems, but it does hold open a gracious space for hope and reconciliation to enter so that heaven and earth can join as God rejoices.

Grace and Peace, Stephanie+