

**Kingdom or Kindom**—Matthew 25: 31-46  
(November 26, 2023-Reign of Christ Sunday)

...Help us to walk together,  
pray together,  
sing together,  
and live together  
until that day when all God's children  
- Black, White, Red, Brown and Yellow -  
will rejoice in one common band of humanity  
in the reign of our Lord and of our God, we pray.<sup>1</sup>

That's a beautiful vision MLK expresses. He is answering the same question Jesus does in our faith story this morning. What will it look like when get out of God's way and let God take charge? What will the kingdom of God look like?

What do you think of that word, kingdom? I ask because in recent times some of us in the liberal/progressive Christian fold are replacing the word "kingdom" with the word "kindom". *The Inclusive Bible* uses "kindom". My understanding is it's being done because the word "kingdom", a word that is associated with hierarchy, coercion, and authoritarianism, doesn't square with the concept of a loving God. I get it, the word "kindom" fits the God of justice and mercy better. It speaks of God as part of and among us, God known in inclusive community. It's very United Church.

I have to say though that I always say "kindom" with a twinge of regret. Because, as important as the word "kindom" is to understanding and relating to God in a changed way, the reality is something is lost when we drop the word, "kingdom" in reference to the supremacy of God in our lives and our world. You see there are scholars who believe "kingdom" is a deliberate and subversive word choice by Jesus and/or the gospel writers. Jesus is turning the word "kingdom" on it's head, comparing and contrasting the kingdom of Rome and Caesar with the kingdom of God, a notion that completely undermines itself. It's as if Jesus saying, "you know what it means to serve Caesar, here's what it means to serve God."

This passage has resonance for Matthew's audience. He is writing for a community of Jewish Jesus followers who are dealing with the aftermath of the brutal suppression by Rome of the Jewish uprising in the year 62 in the city of Jerusalem. A suppression which destroyed the temple, literally believed to be the dwelling place of God on earth. The question is "how do you survive in Caesar's kingdom without serving him?" "How do you carve out space for the kingdom of God in the midst of the Caesar's kingdom?"

The answer, stop playing Caesar's power games. Hope comes in no longer striving for a place in Caesar's kingdom but in God's kingdom. I find it so interesting this passage comes right after the parable of the talents which we explored last week. We considered

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<sup>1</sup> Just prior to the reflection the congregation viewed a video of this [prayer](#) titled *A Prayer for the Church*, written by Martin Luther King Junior. The original video is created by the [Work of the People](#) which offers a fee-based service to which Parkminster subscribes.

the possibility that the third slave, the one who refuses to enrich his master, the one who refuses to participate in injustice, the one condemned, is actually the commendable one. The placement strikes me as scripture speaking to scripture, “look, the last slave is the praiseworthy one—he refuses to play the master’s game”.

Don’t play Caesar’s game, where relationships are transactional, where resources are scarce, where motivation derives from threats, where competition separates and divides, where vying for place results in violence. Don’t serve that king, it’s a dead end. Playing Caesar’s game will shape your life. Caesar’s game will structure your life<sup>2</sup> in a way that separates you from others. It’s a lonely life, an anxious life, a mean life. It’s hard to see when you’re comfortably ensconced in Caesar’s court, when Caesar buys your obedience. That’s why invitations to that other kingdom often come to us in the voices of those for whom Caesar has no use.

I read a story about an unhoused man in a shelter, who had been on the receiving end of a great deal of Christian advice about how to get back on his feet. After being coached on handling his addiction, applying for jobs, managing his finances, and qualifying for low-income housing, he finally looked at the person most invested in his rehabilitation and said, “Why you want to fix me up and feed me back into the same machine that grind me up in the first place?”<sup>3</sup> Good question. Caesar will grind you up, just look at the encampments, the anxiety of precarious housing, addiction, the rates of anxiety and depression. Jesus asks, “Is this the king you want to serve, is the kingdom for which you long? If it’s not stop serving Caesar, serve God.”

I look around searching for examples and I’m struck how A Better Tent City (ABTC) does this. Sometimes in the adulation that ABTC now receives we forget that it begins as an illegal endeavour.<sup>4</sup> In 2018, Nadine Green, one of the founders begins allowing unhoused people to sleep overnight on the floor of her variety store in downtown Kitchener, something bylaws do not permit. Eventually, partly because she refuses to stop providing space for the unsheltered, she is forced to close her business. Ron Doyle, moved by the plight of these folks, his own Roman Catholic faith and Nadine’s story offers the space at his industrial property for these people to sleep in contravention of zoning and other regulations. In these actions are a defiance and determination to stop playing Caesar’s game, a game that grinds people up. There is a resolve to no longer seek approval in Caesar’s kingdom because both Ms. Green and Mr. Doyle are driven by the imperative of love, the dignity and worth of all people. When did we see you Jesus without a home? In downtown Kitchener’s streets and in Nadine Green’s variety store. Serving Caesar means there’s certain people you just don’t serve, they don’t benefit Caesar in any way. But in the kingdom of God there’s no difference between serving God and serving those in need.

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<sup>2</sup> The Rev. Canon Marianne Wells Borg, [On plucking out your eye and the kingdom of God](#), September 30, 2021,

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, [The Parable of the Fearful Investor](#) Matthew 25:14-30 ~ Proper 28, Year A. A sermon preached in Duke University Chapel on November 13, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Laura Hamilton, [A Better Tent City-Alair](#) (video).

Nadine Green, Ron Doyle and ABTC live the words of Jesus in a profound way, if you want to serve God, just look around you. Open your eyes and hearts Jesus says. I am among you in Caesar's cast offs, the ones who are of no use to him, the ones denied a seat in Caesar's court. Serve the ones Caesar sees as the least among you and you will be serving God. There is no difference. Even as you exist in Caesar's kingdom you will live in God's realm. A realm of common humanity not division, a realm of abundance not scarcity, a realm of peace not anxiety and fear, a realm of community not isolation, a realm of compassion not violence. The kingdom of God is a present reality for those with eyes and hearts to see.

If the kingdom of God is a veiled reality available to us now then all that eternal punishment, goats and sheep stuff in Matthew isn't about some after life reward or punishment for pleasing or displeasing a demanding God. I think Matthew is more descriptive than prescriptive.<sup>5</sup> It's about what we're doing to ourselves, to our neighbours, our society depending on whom we choose to serve. It's about how Caesar separates us from God, the God who dwells among us.

It's also about possibility, the possibility of eternal life as Matthew calls it, life in the presence of God. A life that cannot be taken from you by the powers of this world. A life that plays by a different set of rules, a completely different game. Not a finite game that ends with a winner, In the words of Ron Doyle, a successful entrepreneur, "I hate competition, so I don't compete,...There's no competition helping somebody that's sleeping in a storefront or on the sidewalk..."<sup>6</sup> No, not a finite game with a winner, but an infinite<sup>7</sup>, eternal game that simply continues the play; where everyone is invited, where everyone is pulled into it's joy "...in one common band of humanity in the reign of our Lord and of our God...", where amid an earthly kingdom, a holy kindom reveals itself. Friends, it is among us. This is gift and grace. Let's claim it.

Rev. Joe Gaspar

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<sup>5</sup> Rev. Ginger Gaines-Cirelli, [Invisible Christ](#), November 26, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> CBC News, [Ron Doyle, landlord behind Kitchener's Better Tent City, did what 'nobody else was doing'](#), Mar 20, 2021,

<sup>7</sup> The concept of finite and infinite games come from the work of James Carse in his book, "*Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility*", a summary of which may be found [here](#).