



Christ United Methodist Church

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Date: November 25, 2018

Sermon: Where Is the Kingdom of God?

Text: John 18:33-37

Speaker: Pastor Don Archer

In today's gospel reading Jesus is asked if he is the King of the Jews. Jesus responds (in part) by saying that his kingdom is not from this world. This raises the question: Where is his kingdom? If not from this world then where?

The kingdom that Jesus refers to is from God, it is the kingdom of God and it is unlike any kingdom before or since. It is a kingdom that cannot be destroyed by any army, political or social revolution, or manipulated by technology. It is an invisible kingdom with a very visible and powerful presence.

At one point in his journey toward Jerusalem, Jesus is approached by a man who wants to know which commandment is the greatest, or most important. Jesus responds by saying that the first is Love God with all your being and that the second is connected to the first: Love others as yourself. When the man asking the question hears the response, he agrees and then says, *these are greater than all rituals and observances*. Then Jesus says to him: *you are not far from the **kingdom of God***.

It is no secret that the foundation for the kingdom of God is love. Love for God, love for others ... all others. It is not doctrine or dogma or adherence to a particular creed or confession. The kingdom of God is built on unconditional love. The kingdom of God is revealed whenever, wherever, this love is at work. And it is at work in the world today.

Last week, I shared with you how devastating it is to watch the news coverage of the fires in California. Heart wrenching stories of lives lost, people still unaccounted for. Houses, communities, consumed. I have been particularly moved this week by the stories of those whose job it is to sift through the rubble, searching for those who did not survive. Their approach is one of caring and sensitivity. Trying so very hard to help family members find the answer to the question they don't want to ask. *Did my love one survive?*

The kingdom of God is revealed in the compassion and empathy that can be heard in the voices of the search team members. As we gathered around the table this past Thursday with family and friends, many in the aftermath of the California fires had no place to gather, let alone the means to put a meal together. So it was with a thankful heart that I received reports of many restaurants (chain and local) staying open on Thanksgiving. Serving free meals to the firefighters, first responders, and search teams ... as well as individuals and families who had survived. Restaurant owners setting aside time with their families to serve others. Restaurant employees working without pay to prepare, cook, and serve their neighbors. That is the kingdom of God in the real

world. That same kingdom work is carried out here on the first Friday of every month. It was made manifest in community meals offered by churches and staffed by volunteers locally and throughout our nation. We even had members of the MHS Student Council using our kitchen facilities this week to prepare food for families that needed a little help. It was the most frightening group of cooks that I have ever seen assembled in our kitchen ... and that's saying a lot! But it was, whether they knew it or not, kingdom of God work.

Over the past few weeks the UM congregations in Marietta have been collecting money to purchase items for cleaning kits that will be used to help hurricane and flood clean up in the Carolinas and other areas. On Saturday morning youth and adults gathered at Norwood Church and assembled those items, placing them into five gallon buckets to be shipped to the UM Committee on Relief, distribution center in Louisiana. 50 kits. Over \$4000. raised. Where is the kingdom of God? It was in the Norwood gym on Saturday as much as it is in our sanctuary today.

Jesus observed the kingdom of God in the incredible faith of a poor widow who placed everything she had to live on in the temple treasury. He saw it in the faces of those who listened to the voice of truth, his voice. He saw it in the eyes of those who looked to him for hope. He saw it in the behavior of children and in the kindness of enemies brought together by tragedy and suffering.

My kingdom (Jesus said) is not from this world. His kingdom is from God. It is the light of God, the love of God, released, revealed, in/through the most unlikely people at the most unusual times. The kingdom of God has no borders or boundaries. It is not this or any other building. The kingdom of God is not a subsidiary of The United Methodist Church, The Presbyterian Church, The Lutheran Church, The Roman Catholic Church or any other denomination. The Christian community does not have exclusive rights to the kingdom of God. It has been around long before Christianity. It has existed whenever/wherever people have endeavored to love God with all their being and to love their neighbor as their self.

The man who entered a Pittsburgh Synagogue and killed worshipers because they were Jews, was treated for his own gunshot wounds by a medical staff that included Jewish nurses and other care givers. There are Muslim men and women who are doing the work of the kingdom of God as they give themselves to the work of peace and of restoring human dignity to people of all faiths. (But we are told that Muslims are only terrorists.)

The kingdom of God is not the property of any religion or any person or group of persons. The work of the kingdom of God is carried out by the very young and the very old. It's ambassadors are men and women, persons of all colors and languages and nations.

Jesus said that there will be times when we do the work of the kingdom without even realizing it. In the 25th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus describes the judgment of the nations. The Son of Man will say to those at his right hand: *Come, inherit the **kingdom** prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

*For I was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick and in prison and you cared for me. Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you in this condition? And the **king** will answer them: ...just as you did it to one of the least of these ...you did it to me.*

The Roman army destroyed the Temple in 70AD. It did not destroy the faith of the sons and daughters of Abraham. The enemies of Jesus conspired to have him executed, put to death on a cross. It did not destroy the kingdom that he came announcing and inviting others to receive and to participate in. The kingdom built on love. Love of God, love of others. A kingdom not of this world, but very much at work in this world.

If we are careful. If we are observant. If we can suspend our doubt and prejudice, we can see it. If we listen, we can hear the voice of truth, calling us to work and live and love in such a way that *the kingdom will come and that God's will is done, here, on earth, today... as it is in heaven.*

Amen.