

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

November 20, 2022—CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY, YR. C

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Homily: “*The Kingdom of God is Righteousness, Peace, and Joy*”*

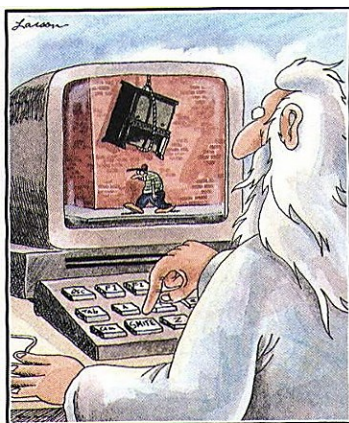
Jeremiah 23:1-6 (The prophet foretells the coming of Israel’s Savior)
Canticle 16 (God has raised up for us a mighty Savior)
Colossians 1:11-20 (Christ is the image of the invisible God)
St. Luke 23:33-43 (Jesus is proclaimed a king by Pilate)

Today, the last Sunday of the Church Year, we come together to celebrate Christ as King, and His eventual return in glory, when He will judge the world with wisdom and fairness. But in the meantime, let’s face it, we citizens of the Republic that is the United States of America are neither familiar nor comfortable with, the notion of kings and kingdoms. After all, more than 200 years ago, we fought a revolution to get rid of the monarch we had!

On the other hand, the Kingdom of God is nothing like an earthly realm, for Jesus said in Luke 17 (vv. 20-21, NCV): “God’s kingdom is coming, but not in a way that you will be able to see with your eyes. People will not say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’ because *God’s kingdom is within you.*” Aha! If that is so, then how can we identify it? St. Paul tells us in Romans 14 (v. 17, CEV), “the Kingdom of God is about pleasing God, about living in peace, and about true happiness. All this comes from the Holy Spirit.” So let’s unpack this:

First: Pleasing God. How do we do that? Well, the Bible contains several clues to entering God’s Kingdom. In Mark 1:15 (NIV), John the Baptizer proclaims: “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” So, the first way to please God is to be sorry for our sins, and receive the forgiveness He grants us through the mercy of Christ. Also in Mark 10 (v. 15, ESV), Jesus teaches, “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” That’s because little kids are trusting; they have no agendas; they tend to accept whatever they are told, and to follow where they are led. We too, should accept what God tells us through the Bible and the Church, and follow His leading.

Second: Living in peace. We are most able to live peacefully with others when we love them, while believing that we ourselves are loved. Deep down, every one of us desires be known just as we are—and fully loved in spite of our character deficiencies and annoying traits. We crave intimacy—and isn’t it ironic that so many are doing this by way of the Internet? We worry that if others truly knew us, if we were to tell them honestly all the shameful things we’ve ever thought, said, or done, they wouldn’t love us. And we’re probably right.



God at His computer

As a result, we tend to think of God the way humorist Gary Larson portrayed Him in a cartoon that’s one of my favorites: It shows the Almighty as a bearded old man sitting at His computer, watching some poor schnook wandering aimlessly down a street. God’s finger is poised over a keyboard button marked “Smite,” and there’s an old upright piano dangling by a fraying rope, just above the guy’s head.

However, the Lord Jesus is not like that. Over and over, the Bible shows us His great love, mercy, forgiveness, and compassion for the lost, the unsaved, and even for His own confused, fumbling, messed-up disciples.

In John 12:47, Jesus declares, “I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.” And in 1 John 4:18, we are told: “There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment.”

If we truly understand that Jesus' heart is not inclined toward punishing us, but rather toward loving us into His Kingdom, that should go a long way toward reducing our personal anxiety, as well as our deepest fears.

I was reading about a pastor whose three-year-old daughter, along with the rest of her family, was opening Christmas packages. As was often the case, his wife had recycled some bows from previous years, and their daughter grabbed a large one and placed it on top of her head. But the old tape left on it caused the bow to stick to her hair. That sight caused everyone to start laughing, which tickled the little girl.

Amidst their laughter, she cried out, "Look, I'm a present!" Well, you know what? To God, each of us is a gift, and we are worth keeping and using in His Kingdom.¹

This brings us to the **third** description of God's kingdom within us: True happiness. In John 15:14, Jesus tells His followers, "You are my friends," and in Proverbs 17:17, we read, "a friend loves at all times"—that means, no matter what: Warts and all! And in Psalm 139:15, we learn that that God knew us and loved us from before we were even born.

So, when we realize, when we profoundly believe that Jesus loves us deeply and unconditionally—in spite of our sins, selfishness, and stupidity—we will have true happiness and peace deep inside. Or, in a different translation of this passage, the Kingdom of God within us is characterized by "righteousness, peace, and joy."

Now, the best news is, we don't have to—in fact, we cannot—achieve pleasing God, live in peace, or experience true happiness, on our own. We can't become Kingdom Kids through our own merit, goodness, efforts, or smarts. The Bible says, "all of this"—the righteousness, peace, and joy, "comes from the Holy Spirit." It is the power of God within us that leads us to repentance and faith; that helps us to know we are loved, so that we can love others and live in peace; and as a result, fills us with joy.

First Corinthians 4:20 confirms this idea, when St. Paul writes: "the Kingdom of God is ... living by God's power." That's right—God's power, not ours. So, if you want to access the Kingdom of God within you, push the "Power" button, the one marked "Holy Spirit." And let God's Spirit transform, renew, comfort, uplift, and guide you, each and every day.

Of course, the Kingdom of God—Heaven—is a destination, too. The Bible promises that Christian believers will go there after we die. But at the same time, in Matthew 4:17, Jesus says "The Kingdom of Heaven has *already* come." What are we to make of that?

Yes, God's Kingdom is within us, but we also ask that God's Kingdom will come among us, whenever we pray The Lord's Prayer. When we say, "Thy kingdom come," we are asking God to manifest the power and glory of His kingdom in us, and throughout our world.² We are praying for justice and peace; kindness and reconciliation; freedom from evil; safety and security; salvation for unbelievers; medical care for the poor; and food for the hungry. And God intends for us to help Him accomplish these Kingdom purposes.

When we truly believe the Kingdom of God is within us, through our faith in Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit's help we will begin spreading God's Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy throughout our families, workplaces, classrooms, neighborhoods, and community. And then, many with whom we come into contact will want to be part of Christ's Kingdom, too. Alleluia! *Amen*.

^{*} Adapt. N. George-Hacker, 24 November 2013, St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, Cobleskill NY. Used with permission.

¹ Adapt. "A Present," 2 December 2002. [SermonCentral.com](https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/10995/christmas-advent-by-sermon-central) <<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/10995/christmas-advent-by-sermon-central>> 14 November 2022. Used with permission.

² Ralph F. Wilson, "The Lord's Prayer: Matthew 6:9-15," © 2022, [JesusWalk Bible Study Series](http://www.jesuswalk.com/manifesto/8_lords-prayer.htm), <http://www.jesuswalk.com/manifesto/8_lords-prayer.htm> 14 November 2022. Used with permission.