

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20
July 3, 2016

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!
Amen.

“Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.” Two times this morning Jesus utters this phrase. Notice the fact Jesus doesn’t say, “The kingdom of God will come near” in some distant time; but, rather He says it has come near – right then and there. What do we think of when we hear the term “kingdom of God?” Do we envision a future time and place? Perhaps, it’s that heavenly kingdom where we are face-to-face with God and there is no more crying, pain, or separation between us and God and between one another and we aren’t entirely wrong if this is our vision because we trust that time when all the evil powers of this world have been thwarted and God’s reign comes to fruition; however, clearly the kingdom of God as Jesus teaches and illustrates also breaks into our earthly lives each and every second of the day. Yet, this is a tough concept to see and believe at times; especially, when day after day we hear, read, and watch horrific acts of violence, shootings, and other acts that run so counter to God’s will. We question whether or not God is anywhere to be found. We wonder if the darkness has overtaken the light. We become despondent and wonder if anything we do really makes a difference. Ah, how the enemy loves it when this happens!

Even within the church we often find ourselves wondering if God’s kingdom is really drawing near. Attendance is declining. Giving has fallen off in many

congregations and throughout entire church bodies. Wednesday is no longer even deemed “church” night in many communities. Committees can’t be sustained. Does it really matter? Are we really making a difference? Is God’s kingdom truly drawing near? YES! Yes, God’s kingdom has drawn near. Say it with me: Yes, God’s kingdom has drawn near. God’s kingdom has indeed drawn near because Jesus says it is so. God’s has drawn near because God in Christ drew near. And if we wonder what God’s kingdom looks like then we only have to look toward the life of Jesus Christ for insight.

- God’s kingdom challenges the status quo
- God’s kingdom searches out the lost, forgotten, outcast, and sinners and restores them to community and welcomes them into the kingdom
- God’s kingdom provides an abundance for all even when our human minds only see scarcity
- God’s kingdom brings comfort, compassion, healing, and wholeness
- God’s kingdom knows no bounds when it comes to forgiveness
- God’s kingdom is always about love at all costs
- God’s kingdom crosses every boundary and limit set up by humanity
- God’s kingdom comes when we least expect it
- God’s kingdom comes even when the forces of death seem to have the last say; however, they never will as new life emerges through Christ and hope for the future dawns
- God’s kingdom calls all people to do God’s work even ordinary, average, everyday folk who are equipped by Jesus to do extraordinary, important, and essential kingdom work and it continues even when we fail or think we aren’t good enough to that work

The kingdom of God has come near. Right now because Jesus reminds us that where two or three are gathered in His name He will be there so the kingdom must be at hand. It is right here and right now because this is a holy place God has set aside in which the Spirit of God gathers us, forgives us, feeds us, equips us, and then sends us out to God’s

work. It is right here and right now because in this holy space the Spirit helps us set aside any animosities we have with one another, any divisions, any anger or hatred, and simply dwell in Christ's love, compassion, and forgiveness. The kingdom of God is at hand because we proclaim that in this space all are equal, all are welcome, all are cherished, all are children of God, all are fed and forgiven, all are loved, and all are called, gathered, and sent to do kingdom work.

The kingdom of God came near several weeks ago when the Spirit gathered 50 plus children together to learn about God's great love for them. The kingdom came near when two congregations joined together and put aside our differences to further the kingdom. The kingdom came near when volunteers walked with these children providing meals, singing songs, playing games, and teaching them the good news of Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God came near when these kids and their families brought forth items for the Food Pantry to be distributed to those in our community who hunger.

Yet, the kingdom of God does not simply come near within the walls of Christ's church. No the kingdom of God comes near in all we do in the name of Jesus Christ. It comes near when our words and actions are received by another but it also comes near even when those words and actions are not received by the other as our text tells us. The kingdom of God comes near in us because Jesus instructs and empowers us to do

His work, be His hands, and further the kingdom He was sent to usher in. It comes near even when we don't even realize we are doing kingdom work.

Because you see Jesus uses us wherever we are at. He uses us in our daily lives beyond these walls. He calls us in our baptisms and then He uses us sending us out and as this text tells us all we need is His power to do some pretty incredible stuff. All we need to do is trust He is with us, He has equipped us, and He will work through us. He uses us in our daily vocations whatever those may be and yes to our young people being a student is a vocation to which our faith tells us God has called you and indeed God is using you. For example, John was riding the bus one day and noticed several boys picking on another boy. He noticed that boy start to cry. John wasn't sure what he could do as those other boys were so much bigger than he was. Yet, he sensed deep within he had to do something. This was not right. He remembered something he heard at church, "God loves everyone and we are called to love everyone." So, John told his parents and the next day they went to school and told the principal who ultimately put a stop to this activity. Our faith tells us the kingdom of God drew near that day. Or take Susan. She was frustrated with her job thinking she wasn't making a difference. The pay wasn't the best. Somedays, it just seemed tedious – the same old thing day after day in her job as a custodian until one day something she heard at church changed her mind. God was using her even as a custodian. No, she couldn't post signs about how great God was. No she didn't have to stop everyone that passed

by her and say something about Jesus to them. But nonetheless God was using her. She was an agent of hospitality providing a welcoming space at her place of employment. She was caring for God's creation insisting to her boss they find greener and safer cleaning alternatives. And then one day another employee approached her and said, "You know Susan, I am grateful for you. You always stop what you are doing, look up, smile and say 'hello.'" It makes my day. God's kingdom had drawn near. Our words and actions matter. God works through us even we may not realize it. The kingdom has drawn near. We pray the Spirit open our eyes to see it, proclaim it to a world who longs for it, and continues to equip us for kingdom work!