

**Ps 25:1-10; Jer 33:14-16;
1 Thess 3:9-13; Lu 21:25-36**
God's Kingdom Is Near

Jesus referred to the kingdom of God at least fifty times in the Gospels. He speaks often about the character and the qualities of His heavenly Father – the Creator of the universe. And where God is, there is God's kingdom. Jesus and the Holy Spirit were present with the Father before the beginning of time. They live in sublime eternal unity and love – three distinct divine Persons of the same holy substance. So, Jesus, fully God – fully human, participated in the creation of all this: what we see, feel and experience as reality. Of course, some things we experience are unreal or surreal – I would count Black Friday and Cyber Monday among these unreal or surreal things. Things that are just features of somebody's marketing plan.

Apart from what is surreal or unreal, the kingdom of God is the basis of all reality. We do not perceive the kingdom of God with our five senses. There are visions – many visions described in the Bible by prophets and saints. But, we do not ordinarily perceive God's kingdom

with our biological equipment – eyes, ears, fingertips, nose or taste buds. We perceive the kingdom of God by our faith. Wesley described faith as the faculty by which we know God. By the witness of those who have been in the presence of God, we get to know our God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So the Bible and its stories of God and God’s people is a vital part of our faith life. The Bible brings the kingdom of God near.

The writer of Hebrews gives us help in understanding the working of faith – the life of faith in the world – the gift of faith which is by God’s grace, not our own effort, study or human insight. Faith is a gift. Hebrews 11:1-3: “Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction (*in the sense of being convinced*) of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.” (NASB) We wait for the kingdom to come by faith.

Just last week we heard Jesus tell Pilate,

“My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.” (Jn 18:36) Jesus revealed to Pilate the character of the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is ultimate reality – unseen, often undetected or forgotten – in our world. The kingdom of God is not of this world. The kingdom of God is the presence of God – in all places at all times. We can be confident that the kingdom of God is near.

There is a great saying suitable for framing – in cross-stitch or in calligraphy: “Invited or Uninvited – God is here.” In earlier times folks said: “Bidden or Unbidden – God is here.” This simple expression is a statement of faith in God and in God’s ultimate authority. God’s kingdom is near.

Advent is just a shorthand way of acknowledging that all creation has been waiting. If advent is something coming toward you and me, then what a blessing to be awake and alive when it

gets here! The coming of Messiah Jesus into the world was a big surprise. Think of the most learned people of the time (1st c AD) teaching and preaching about the coming of the powerful Messiah – hero and savior of the nation – arriving with a massive army – seated on a stallion in armor and with sword and bow and spear.

The Prophet Jeremiah shares God’s promise to a creation groaning in spiritual decay. “The Lord is coming and the Lord is our righteousness,” he said. Adonai Tsidkenu. Singers and psalmists celebrate the virtues and qualities of the coming of heaven: truth, mercy, steadfast love, forgiveness and cleansing, goodness, justice, covenant faithfulness.

All were waiting for a grand entrance! Is this the arrival of Messiah – a baby born to a poor Judean couple not even yet married? Where? In a stable? Is this a great divine attempt at humor? This is a helpless newborn. The only army is a group of shepherds in the pastures of Bethlehem. The only singers a choir of angels – not downtown, but out in the country. The news comes to some Gentiles hundreds of miles east of

the site of the miracle? This is the king? This little baby is – well, one of us. The kingdom of God is drawing nearer by a quiet miracle.

The shredding of the barrier between earth and heaven took place that night in Bethlehem. It happened very low key, almost secretly – out of the reach of Herod the Great – out of the reach of the Roman authorities. The child was like a mustard seed – planted in faith and growing into a great tree that has become the home of many creatures. The kingdom of God. That holy night, and that brief unblemished human life-time are now part of history.

What are we waiting for? What is Advent 2018 about? Jesus promised that there is a day yet to come – the big Day – the Day of Judgment – the Day of the Son of Man. We, along with the whole creation, are waiting for Christ's promised return. Jesus' return will be the complete fulfillment of the kingdom of God. The kingdom will be revealed – right here for all to see and hear and experience.

Not one creature will be excluded. Jesus says that the kingdom “will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth.” (v 55)

What are you and I to do as the “powers of the heavens are shaken”? And as there is distress among the nations – the roaring of the sea and the waves? What should be our answer to such a time of tribulation?

Jesus says as we see everything coming unraveled, “Stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

What are you and I to do as we wait for Jesus to return? It could be tonight or tomorrow. Do this: Watch and pray. Stay in close touch with God. Step out in faith with your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service and your witness. Stay prepared. The kingdom of God is near. Amen.