

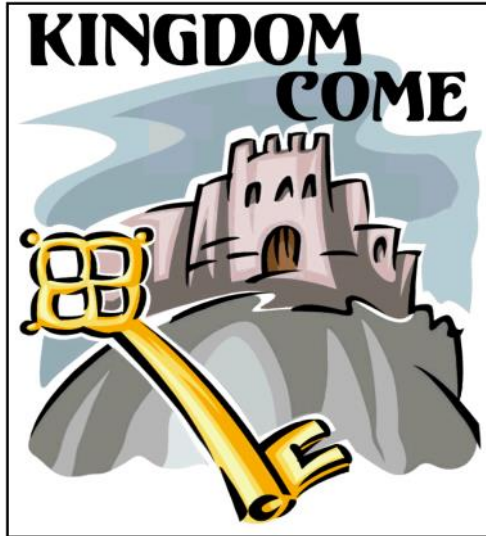
Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

SERMON FOR

November 30, 2015

“The Kingdom of God Is Near”



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Menifee United Church of Christ

Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM

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Live Life Fully Alive!

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith. Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Luke 21:29-36

Then he told them a parable: 'Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. 'Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.'

The Kingdom of God Is Near

People have various views of the kingdom of God - heaven - which some people see as somewhere over the rainbow and as somewhere under the rainbow. Although not everyone sees that.

An 85-year-old couple were married 60 years. They'd been in good shape because the wife made them eat healthy, serving her husband only low cholesterol foods, like bran muffins.

Tragically, they died in a car accident. When they got to heaven, St. Peter took them to their mansion. The elderly man said, "How much is it?" St. Peter said, "It's free!" Then St. Peter took them out back to see the golf course that their mansion backed up to. St. Peter said they could golf anytime they wanted. The elderly man said, "How much is it?" St. Peter said, "It's free!" Then St. Peter took them to the clubhouse and showed them the buffet table with all kinds of delicious food on it. The elderly man said, "How much is it?" St. Peter said, "It's free!" The elderly man said, "Okay. But where are all the low cholesterol foods?" St. Peter said, "You don't have to worry about that!" The elderly man looked at his wife and said, "You and your bran muffins. I could have been here ten years ago!"

Poets know that heaven is in the hereafter and in the here and now. William Blake was an English poet who lived 200 years ago. William Blake wrote about heaven on earth. "To see a world in a grain of sand and heaven in a wild flower: Hold infinity in the palm of your hand and eternity in an hour." When we can see "heaven in a wild flower," then we know that the kingdom of God - heaven - is near.

Writers know that heaven is in the future and in the present. Henry David Thoreau lived in Walden a hundred and fifty years ago. Henry David Thoreau wrote about heaven. "Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads." When we can see heaven, "under our feet," and, "over our heads," then we know that the kingdom of God - heaven - is near.

What say you? Do you believe the kingdom of God - heaven - is tomorrow and also today? This is a United Church of Christ church, so you're free to answer that question however you like. And I'm a United Church of Christ minister, so I'm free to answer that question however I like. And by the end of this sermon you'll know how I answer that question.

Jesus came to tell us that the kingdom of God - heaven - isn't far away at all.

I like to ask Christians: What's the good news? At first they look at me kind of funny and then they say: That Jesus died for our sins. Or they look at me kind of funny and then they say: That Jesus was resurrected from the dead. Or they look at me kind of funny and then they say: That our sins have been forgiven. But, according to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus said, "As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'" So the good news is: The kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God, is close by.

In Luke, Jesus tells us to look for a sign that the kingdom of God - heaven - is near. Now granted, he's talking about looking for a sign that the kingdom of God - the Second Coming - is near. But I believe we can also look for a sign that the kingdom of God - heaven on earth - is near. As Jesus says, just like when we, "Look at the fig tree and all the trees" and when, "they sprout leaves," we, "know that summer" is near. So we can look for signs that the kingdom of God - the Second Coming - is near. And, I believe, we can look for signs that the kingdom of God - heaven on earth - is near. What are those signs?

First Thessalonians tells us that one of those signs is when "the Lord make(s) you increase and abound in love for one another and for all," then we know that the kingdom of God - The Second Coming - is near. And, I believe, that's also when we know that the kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth - are near.

So if we want to bring the kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth - near, then we should follow the words of First Thessalonians and, "increase and abound in love for one another and for all."

I hear and see the kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth - all around me.

Christmas music causes me to hear the kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth - all around me. We'll soon sing, "It Came Upon The Midnight Clear." We'll sing, "It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old, from angels bending near the earth, to touch their harps of gold; 'Peace on the earth, good will to all, great news of joy we bring.' The world in solemn stillness lay to hear the angels sing." When we sing that, I will hear the kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth - all around me.

Beaches cause me to see the kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth - all around me. Whether I'm walking on the beach in Oceanside, watching people surf; or walking on the beach in Florida, on our honeymoon; or walking on the beach in Michigan, watching a sunset; I see the kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth - all around me.

Our Thanksgiving dinner at our church last Thursday caused me to see the kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth - all around me. Whether it was the 144 people we served, members of this congregation and people I've never even met before, including people we delivered meals to; or whether it was the dozens of volunteers who made food and served food; I saw the kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth - all around me.

I hope you also hear and see the kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth - all around you.

Unfortunately, the kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth - are not always readily apparent.

In Paris a couple weeks ago, where was the kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth - when terrorists killed more than a

hundred people and wounded hundreds of others? I don't know. All I know is: The kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth - came after that, when the survivors and others reached out to help those who were hurt and reached out to comfort the loved ones of those who were killed.

In Chicago a year or so ago, where was the kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth - when a white police officer killed a 17-year-old black kid, shooting him 16 times? I don't know. All I know is: The kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth - will come, to the extent that that's possible, when justice is done.

In Menifee the other day, where was the kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth - when someone left a nasty message on our church voicemail and put up a hateful sign in the front yard of our church, just because I said we would house Syrian refugees? I don't know. All I know is: The kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth - came after that, in the form of several supportive calls, emails, and Facebook messages, and in the form of several Muslim young people, who expressed their support for our support of Syrian refugees.

So the kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth - may not always be readily apparent. But eventually they do appear.

The Christmas season is when the kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth - are near.

At the Sun City United Methodist Church the other day, during our annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Service, the kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth - were near. Clergy and members of our church, the Methodist church, the Lutheran church, the Mormon church, and several other churches, filled the pews. For more than an hour, with fellowship time afterwards, it really was the kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth.

Clergy were asked to speak at that service about something we were thankful for. So I said I was thankful for my daughter. I told her that when I talked to her on the phone the other day. I told her how I said to people that I feel bad because I sometimes see her as two or three or four years old, when I know she's 24. She said, "I'm 23, Dad." I know that. I was in the delivery room when she was born in 1992, 23 years ago. So the good news is, I'm seeing her as older than she is, rather than seeing her as younger than she is. But in all seriousness, even when she corrects me, whenever I talk to my daughter, on the phone or in person, I am in the kingdom of God - heaven and heaven on earth.

Don't wait to die to get to the Kingdom of God - heaven - like that elderly man did. You're in the kingdom of God now! When you see beauty, like walking on a beach at sunset: The kingdom of God is near. When you help someone in need, like at our Thanksgiving dinner: The kingdom of God is near. When you love others, like at our Interfaith Thanksgiving Service: The kingdom of God is near. Now, you might still have to eat low cholesterol foods. But Jesus wants you to know: The kingdom of God is near.

Let us pray...

God of Love,

Help us to know that your kingdom is near.

Help us to know that your kingdom is here.

And help us to know that your kingdom is...

Now and forevermore.

By the power of the Holy Spirit.

And in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

THE GOLDEN RULE

*Do to others what you would
have them do to you.*

Christianity

*What is hateful to you
do not do to others.*

Judaism

*None of you believes until he wishes for his
brother what he wishes for himself.*

Islam

*Do not do to others
what would cause pain if done to you.*

Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself
would find hurtful.*

Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*

Taoism

*Do not do to others
what you do not want them to do to you.*

Confucianism

*Treat other people
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*

Humanism