

The Kingdom of God
Revelation 7:9-10

For the month of July, we have had time to think about God's special call for all of us to take a spiritual journey together. In our journey, God has given us His **GRACE**, which is His loving presence and action to create, heal, forgive, reconcile, and transform human hearts, communities, and the entire creation. God's grace is given to us for our salvation, holiness, and good deeds. The purpose of our life is our **TRANSFORMATION**. In John Wesley's words, this is **Entire Sanctification** or **Christian Perfection**. We are in the ongoing process of becoming more and more like Jesus Christ as we obey the Greatest Command, love God and love our neighbors. In this process, we will continually encounter Jesus Christ, ourselves, and our call anew. Also, we are invited to participate in **GOD'S MISSION**. Jesus Christ's promise to give us his authority and to be with us will always enable us to participate in God's mission to make disciples of all nations. We can go out to the world because of the love and grace we have in our hearts. We use our authority to bless, protect, and train people, which can be summarized in this phrase: to serve people.

Today, the last word we have to bear in mind in our journey together is **the Kingdom of God**.

1. What is the Kingdom of God?

The Kingdom of God can be simply defined as "*the loving reign of God*." The Kingdom is still to come, but at the same time, the kingdom is among us.

Let me quote John Wesley's comment on Matthew 6:10 (**Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven**). "We implore, "**May Thy kingdom of grace come quickly, and swallow up all the kingdoms of the earth!**" (Explanatory Notes: Matt. 6:10). John Wesley called the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Grace. The Kingdom of God hasn't happened yet. It is in the making on earth. It is still to come. That is why we have to wait patiently for the Kingdom. This "not yet" Kingdom allows us to fight for the Kingdom, pray for the Kingdom, live out for the Kingdom, and participate in Jesus' Kingdom movement.

When the Pharisees asked when God's Kingdom was coming, Jesus replied, "**God's Kingdom isn't coming with signs that are easily noticed. Nor will people say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' Don't you see? God's Kingdom is already among you.**" (Luke 17:20-21, CEB). Jesus said that the Kingdom is already present, active, and operative. He even said, "**But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you.**" (Luke 11:20 NIV).

We believe that wherever God's will is done, the Kingdom or reign of God is present. It was present in Jesus' ministry, and it is also present in our world whenever persons and communities experience reconciliation, restoration, and healing. For John Wesley, the Kingdom is not just a Kingdom. It is the Kingdom of Grace. Wherever God's grace is revealed, the Kingdom of God is present and among us.

The Book of Discipline also addresses that point.

“With other Christians, we recognize that the reign of God is both a present and future reality. The church is called to be that place where the first signs of the reign of God are identified and acknowledged in the world. Wherever persons are being made new creatures in Christ, wherever the insights and resources of the gospel are brought to bear on the life of the world, God's reign is already effective in its healing and renewing power.” (The Book of Discipline (2016), *Basic Christian Affirmations*, 50)

2. What is the relationship between the church and the Kingdom of God?

First of all, the church is not the Kingdom of God. The church is a shadow, sign, and instrument for God's Kingdom as it reflects God's grace to the hungry, the sick, the poor, the marginalized, and the victims of human inhumanity. According to Lesslie Newbigin, the church is an appetizer to the Kingdom feast in heaven. It is not the realized Kingdom but a genuine foretaste of the Kingdom on the earth. (The Household of God (2008), 142). That is why the goal of the missions of the church has to be the Kingdom of God. As a foretaste, sign, and instrument of the Kingdom, the church has to be a place where people can find God's grace, forgiveness, healing, restoration, and transformation. One of the best ways to understand how we are doing as God's Kingdom agents is to ask people around us about how we are doing. What kind of reputation do we have from the people in our community or from our family members?

3. Then What does the Kingdom look like?

“After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!”” (Revelation 7:9-10 NRSV)

Today's Scripture vividly presents us with a picture of God's Kingdom, which we must constantly remember in our hearts as we join Jesus' Kingdom movement

on earth. How can this image of God's Kingdom be applied to our understanding of the church?

Grace-Centered Community

At the center of the Kingdom, we can find God's throne and the slain Lamb, which symbolizes Jesus Christ who was crucified on the Cross. The sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross is a clear message of God's love and grace for all of us and all nations. So, as an instrument of God's Kingdom, we have to be a grace community where people can taste and enjoy God's forgiving, healing, reconciling, and transforming grace.

Community of Embrace

Also, there is a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. In God's Kingdom, there is no barrier of race, ethnicity, nationality, and culture. God's love and salvation extend to all nations and all people. As a shadow of God's Kingdom, we are called to reflect God's big heart of embracing everyone into our community.

Community of Singing, Praying, and Proclaiming God's Salvation

The multitude of people from every nation, tribe, people, and language are robed in white with palm branches in their hands. This signifies that their sins are forgiven. Palm branches were used during the Feast of Tabernacles, a joyous festival celebrating God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. So, they are celebrating their liberation from the spiritual bondage of sin. That is why they cried out in a loud voice, **"Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!"** (Revelation 7:10 NRSV)

As an appetizer of God's Kingdom Feast, the church has to hold on to the message of God's salvation only in Jesus Christ, pray for God's salvation, sing God's salvation, and proclaim God's salvation.

4. The Kingdom Life - Application

Then how should we live out our call as God's Kingdom agents? We have to firmly anchor our life into God's love in Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of God is among us as we obey God's will and commands.

I went to **our town's public library** last Tuesday and met a lady named Michelle. I introduced myself to her because many people in the library turned around and seemed to be curious about me. Michelle said there were people who thought I was from the Chinese restaurant in town. When I shared with her that I am a pastor at Carleton UMC, she said, "I know your church very well.

Some of my friends attend your church. Your church has done a wonderful job for our community. I did my baby shower at your church.” I was so blessed to hear about our church’s good reputation in this community.

Let me show you a picture that I took last week. **Corrine** lost her husband, Jack, a few weeks ago and it’s been difficult. Joanne asked me to give a quilt from her ministry group to Corrine. So I took it to her and she appreciated the special gift from her church. She said, “Pastor, I am going to put this on my bed”. She was grateful for her church family remembering her during this difficult time. Her son, Andrew, said, “I’ve never seen this kind of beautiful quilt before in my life.” He appreciated our church’s care for his mom and his family.

Even a small action of obedience can be used to reveal God’s loving reign in someone’s life. Let us remember that we are not the Kingdom of God, but instead, we are an instrument, sign, foretaste, and appetizer to God’s Kingdom. Let us obey God’s invitation to bring forgiveness, healing, restoration, and transformation to the world, to our community, to our denomination, and to our church.

Please think about the people in your life: those who need your presence, those who have been estranged, and those who need God's loving reign and presence. Why don't you reach out to them? If you can't think of anyone, please ask God to use you as a means of grace and show you who needs your presence this week.