

“Happy are those who conduct their affairs  
with justice and rise  
with grace and mercy.” Amen!

Our Bible Study group just began  
studying the Gospel of Mark, and

last week we asked this question to ourselves:

How do we know when we are doing  
kingdom of God work?

There was good discussion around that question  
and it led me to think about the ways

kingdom of God work will change the way  
society sees you.

It's risky business following the call to belong  
to the kingdom of God because it forsakes  
all other kingdoms.

“Discerning God's will requires developing a trust  
in the credibility and integrity of our own being.”

We can submit our judgments upon others and  
receive a worldly reward, you know,  
like being given a place to sit at

the cool kid's table.

Yet, earthly "kings" are temporary, like vapor  
and mist they'll vanish, but the kingdom of God

we believe in tells that we must stand alone  
before a heavenly throne one day and  
give an accounting of our choices and  
our false judgments.

The gospel news remains, this divine throne is  
one of grace, but still reconciliation must  
be made for our God is just. (Pause)

Another God-thing that happened last week  
was when 16 of us came together under  
the direction of the Assistant to the Bishop,

Rev. Derek Hoven and we began  
the Adventures in Renewal process at St. Stephen.

In the coming months, we will also be asking  
that question about kingdom of God work.

We will gather around scripture and listen  
to one another and to people and  
organizations around us.

We will train ourselves to see what

God is up to in their lives and condition  
ourselves to listen to them and  
to the Holy Spirit. (Pause)

What these events, and the lessons today,  
reveal is that a lot boils down  
to the discovery of an identity:

Our own and the identity of this congregation.

When we either think of ourselves  
as servants of the Lord, followers of Jesus or

are we seekers of comfort and  
concerned only about status.

We either think of ourselves as citizens of  
the Kingdom of God or we think of ourselves

as members of this nation's dominant religion  
that bestows certain privileges allowed to  
only a few.

There is a kingdom of God that stands against  
the kingdom of the world. (Pause)

Kingdom of God citizens know there's  
heart disease in our nation.

I don't only mean the kind that comes from

a poor diet or exercise.

There's heart disease in people  
when our hearts are not centered on God.

When we selfishly center on ourselves  
we become arrogant and diagnose everyone  
else's problems without looking at ourselves.

A great example of this is found in our political system.

It's not only a matter of one person,  
but our president has forgotten

the sacred trust bestowed upon him to be  
the moral leader and dutiful servant to the nation  
that elected him.

We diagnose current and future suffering  
under this leadership.

When the decision of officials in power has been  
made to exploit and self-promote we diagnose

a part of the population will follow such leaders  
blindly.

A forgetting about personal responsibility.

Everything becomes the other person's fault.

Without a sense of humility, honesty, and willingness  
to seek an account of how others are affected,  
we find ourselves potentially becoming heartless, too.

Yet the kingdom of God remains  
in opposition to all that.

And it remains because people have  
the ability to reject becoming abusers even  
when they are abused.

There is a gift, a strength, and a will  
to counter hate with love.

Each of us holds an antidote for arrogance.

A vaccine against false leaders to keep us  
from becoming blind and callous.

God has made that antidote known to us  
through Jesus who is the same yesterday,  
today, and forever.

And it was another "God-thing" to me when  
I recalled that the quote from Hebrews was

the closing video scripture memory to our first  
video discussion around Renewal  
last week.

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday,  
today, and forever.” (Pause)

Around this text from Hebrews are a list of  
behaviors and attitudes to keep us knowing  
that what we do is kingdom of God work.

Mutual love, hospitality to strangers  
(they may be angels in our midst),

remember the imprisoned.

This would particularly pertain to  
followers of Jesus who were being locked up  
for doing what Jesus did.

Next is remember the tortured as though  
you are being tortured, honor marriage,

don't have a love for money, and pray for leaders.  
These are all things one can do to follow and  
dwell in the kingdom of God. (Pause)

This reordering of priorities follows along with  
what Jesus taught at the dinner party in

the gospel today.

Sit amidst the lowest and invite the ones  
no one invites and you'll be elevated by Jesus.  
(Pause)

Rolf Jacobsen tells a story of when he was invited  
to a banquet dinner with Maya Angelou.

He was one of many in a large group of  
seminary graduates and professors.

When Rolf entered the banquet space he saw  
a chair open next to Maya.

He wanted to be the one who sat there  
to be near this amazing person.

He said, "I thought if I sat next to her  
maybe her grace, humility, and spirit would  
rub off on me."

Instead, he directed himself, in his wheelchair,  
to an open table in the corner of the room.

As he was finishing his meal he looked over  
to see what Maya Angelou was doing and  
her chair was empty and just then he felt

a hand touch his shoulder as Maya sat in  
the open chair next to Rolf. :-)

She asked him his name and said  
tell me about who you are and  
why you're here? (Pause)

It was a kingdom of God moment and exactly  
the kind of behavior that follows and  
reinforces what Jesus teaches us to do today.

AMEN!