

It's a mad world when news of a global pandemic that has killed so many and forced the entire human race into hiding takes second place to the violence erupting all over the US. Is this the way it's supposed to be? Is this the way God intended us to behave toward one another? Is this the Kingdom of God? For a few days I want to look at that concept of the Kingdom of God and see what we can learn from Jesus' parables about it. How can we better be the Kingdom of God in this mad world?

When I teach Confirmation, we teach Building Blocks, basic statements of the Christian faith. Formerly known as Chatechism Questions, the students have to memorize these Building Blocks as the basics of their faith. There are two about the Kingdom of God: "The Kingdom of God is the rule of God breaking into history through Jesus Christ, working in the world and expressed in the hearts and lives of God's people." "Jesus taught that life in the Kingdom means we are to live in a loving relationship with God and others."

Wherever anyone proclaims and obeys Jesus as King, there is one small outpost of the Kingdom of God. It is not heaven, or Jerusalem, or Israel. It is anywhere that we obey God as king. But this is a problem for us sinful people. We obey Jesus... sometimes. And in some ways. But not all the time. And not in every way. So what happens when we obey Him by tithing but ignore the plight of the oppressed He has called us to answer? What happens when we pray 3x each day but still spend our lives collecting as much money as we can? Is that the Kingdom of God? Things are just not as black and white as that.

One answer to these questions of our partial obedience can be found in Jesus' reaction to the Pharisees. These people were beyond obedient. They made obedience the key to their whole life. They obeyed the OT laws to the letter... and Jesus lambasted them for it. They were "children of hell", Jesus proclaimed. But why? "Woe to you, **scribes** and **Pharisees**, hypocrites! For you tithe **mint**, dill, and **cumin**, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others." Their obedience wasn't about loving God or loving others. It was about personal reputation and pride. Jesus calls us to put our love for others before our obedience to the Law. In fact, Jesus calls us to be about justice, mercy, and faith AS WELL AS (not "instead of") obedience to the rules.

Do you tithe? Do you watch your tongue in public? Do you wear modest clothing? Do you avoid sinful places? Good! But do you work for justice in this world on a regular and self-sacrificing basis? Do you show mercy to those who wrong you? Are you doing the hard work of growing in your trust in God, which means putting yourself in situations where you have to trust Him? Jesus calls these, "the weightier matters of the law" and elevates them above mere obedience.

Are you part of the Kingdom of God, as defined not by your associations with church and Christian people but by your passion for justice, mercy, and faith? Are you tangibly working toward ending the -isms of injustice in our world, from racism to sexism to ageism to classism?

Are you, as our Building Block says, “living in a loving relationship with God and others,” and expanding who exists in that category of “others”?