

The Kingdom of God
(10/16/11-morning prayer)

“Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s and to God the things that are God’s.” Oh how beautiful the words of truth that come from Wisdom.

And what are things that belong to the emperor? Well, let’s see, how about legions of soldiers and horses and chariots and tools of war used to conquer and create “temporary peace” through violence and injustice. And what about the things that are from God: joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control and Love-the Fruits of the Spirit.

The peace that Jesus promoted was to be achieved-not through violence-but through justice. A peace brought about not through greed, or pride or power-No-a peace brought about through a collaboration with God.

Jesus told his disciples that The Kingdom of God had come near. By Jesus’ example, the disciples, and we, are shown how to live lives that will bring us closer to God and further from sin; and, ultimately, to “The Kingdom of God” here-on earth. But, we, like the Jews, seem to have this idea that we need to wait around for God to come to us-when, in fact, God is waiting for us to come to Him. By doing this we acquire God’s collaboration with us in what Biblical scholars, Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan call “The Great Divine Cleanup of the World.” Of course, for this to succeed we need the unity and collaboration of each other in bringing about this Kingdom of God here on earth. It appears-we have a long way to go.

But, it starts with us. It’s up to each of us,, individually, to seek a closer relationship with God by living our lives in accordance with the example set forth to us by Jesus-an example exemplified by bearing the Fruits of the Spirit.

And, given our sinful nature, this challenge seems unreachable. When you consider the

greed and the pride and the natural tendency of us all to focus on "self" this ability to bear Fruits of the Spirit seems impossible. For mortals, it's not possible; but "for God all things are possible."

God, in fact, makes it possible for us by the greatest of all gifts-the grace of His Son, our savior Christ Jesus. It is by this grace we have been saved by faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. By this knowledge and gift we make the choice that leads to life and life in abundance. By "putting on the Lord Jesus Christ" we learn to shed the garment of "self." We do this by faith and by leading lives in accordance with the example given us by Jesus. In this way we learn to "live no longer for ourselves but for Him who died and was raised for us, Jesus Christ our Lord."

Once we have increased our ability to live lives in this way we radiate Christ's light to others proportionately. So, it begins with us. As we continue to pursue lives representative of Jesus' example-live of compassion, peace and justice vs. lives of selfishness, greed and pride we begin to better model and exemplify the Divine Justice intended by God for all-a justice where there's "enough" for everyone.

So our task, of course, initially involves asking God for God's help in what I would call The Great Divine Cleanup of our lives. We can't do it alone. *But, as God tells Moses, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."* We have been learning from our youth to strive for success in the world we live in-you know-get a good job, makes lots of money, good investments, etc. which is probably necessary in a world where we depend on ourselves too much and on God too little. God wants us to need Him more-to need each other more; and, to need ourselves and the enticements of the world less. And, I think that just might be the recipe for our collaborative reconnection with God-and cleanup of the world-culminating in The Kingdom of God on earth.

So then, it's a 3-step process. Step 1: The Great Divine Cleanup of ourselves; Step 2: The resultant reflection and inspiration of that righteousness to others; and, Step 3: Our cumulative collaboration with God in the transformation of this world from a world of self, greed and injustice into world of justice peace and love....

Yes, the accomplishment of Step 3 is currently difficult to bring into focus; but, we can certainly make some head-way with Step 1-and so-Step 2 in proportion. None of us can do it alone, which is why God gives us the Church, the Body of Christ, that includes this faith community known as St. Peter's by the Sea Episcopal Church. Together we strengthen each other in the pursuit and increasing development of Step 1. Together we radiate Christ's light to those in darkness; to those who would seek that light. Let's all commit to continue in this sacred endeavor to first nourish ourselves in this light which teaches us to live in a way which bears the fruits of the Spirit leading to the co-nourishment of each other and the entire Body of Christ. *Just as Paul tells the Thessalonians, "You became an example to all believers... in every place your faith in God has become known."* So, as we persevere we grow and as we grow Christ's light

radiates more brightly to those around us. Once noticed the desire for that light becomes automatic and progressively insatiable.

Our role is clear and begins with Step 1. As we sow the seeds of Step 1 we reap the harvest of Step 2 which produces seeds that are sown for the ultimate harvest which is Step 3. This Step requires no further farming because it contains the things that are from God-the Fruits of the Spirit-The Kingdom of God. Amen.