

Ministry And The Kingdom Of God

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[0 : 0 0] Lord, may this word which is given to all people be given once again, especially for us gathered here tonight.

May the love of Christ for the whole world be love for me and for each one who is here. And may the challenge to all people to seek your kingdom be our challenge this night.

For Jesus Christ's sake, amen. I'm really happy to be here in St. John's Church tonight with you.

Coming into a church and a congregation that you don't belong to is not a new experience for me. I do it practically every Sunday, certainly every other Sunday, as I travel around generally in the vicinity of Toronto, but considerable number of times in other places as well, speaking on behalf of Wycliffe College, of which I'm principal, and trying to find out as I begin in a service to develop some sense of who's here, where they are, where they are in Christ, what they expect, what they look for, and what God is doing in their midst.

And so if it takes me two or three minutes to try to catch up with you, don't be surprised if that happens, and don't be surprised if I don't catch up with you. But it is a great treat to be here in this parish where God is so evidently at work and where individual men and women, older people and not-so-old people, young people and really young people, are continuing to find that Christ is real, that Christ is Lord, that Christ is relevant.

[1 : 5 5] I'm here in Vancouver because I've been attending a conference of principals of Anglican theological colleges, of which there are nine or ten across our country. We finished our meeting, for which I'm grateful, and it's...

And I know those of you who are clergy, and perhaps if any of you are synod delegates, I know you've had your diocesan synod this week, and I'm sure you're equally grateful that that's over as well, probably for some of the same reasons.

I spend a great deal of time thinking and talking to people about ministry. For 19 years, I was a minister in a congregation, or various congregations, and then, five years ago, I became the principal of a theological college, having had very little experience in that kind of ministry prior to that.

And as I got started in it, I felt a little bit like Pontius Pilate. When he first heard the Apostles' Creed, he said, What did I do to get in here? And in some ways, that's how I originally felt when I became principal of Wycliffe College.

It takes a while, doesn't it? I want to bring greetings to you from David Turvey, David and Jane Turvey, and Miriam, who were members of this congregation for a number of years.

[3 : 1 1] David is being ordained on the 15th, or the 17th, rather, the 17th of June, and he's going to be serving in the Diocese of Montreal. I also want to drop another name in front of you, and the name is Dan Gifford.

Dan is a student, a graduate now of our college, originally from somewhere in Canada, latterly from Minnesota, but he's coming out to the Diocese of New Westminster, and he's going to be in Sechelt, which is somewhere up the coast, I guess.

Does anybody know where that is? Oh, look, all sorts of people know. Will some of you take upon yourself to extend to Dan Gifford the right hand of friendship, because he will be a stranger in these parts, but he's a committed Christian young man, and I know that he will want to get to know people in Vancouver, and if you remember and bump into Dan Gifford, say hi to him and take him in.

It's logical when people become Christian that they get involved in ministry. The idea of being a Christian and not being a minister in some senses is a contradiction in terms, but there's a great danger and a great risk of activism for its own sake.

Now that I'm in, what do I do? Perhaps that's not been your experience, but it's certainly been an experience that I've had, because I find people coming to our college and saying, I've become a Christian, I want to be a minister.

[4 : 34] The Lord is calling me to be a minister. And my initial reaction is to rejoice, and sometimes my second and third reaction is also to rejoice. But by the time I get to my fourth or fifth reaction, I sometimes say, hold on, wait a minute.

A minister? For what reason? A minister of whom? A minister for what purpose? When Jesus was asked to give his priorities, when Jesus was asked what the really important issues were, he replied, in political terms and in relational terms.

Relationally, he said, the most important thing is to love God with your whole self, and then to love your neighbor, that is, all other people, to love your neighbor as yourself.

And furthermore, he said, speaking of relationships, follow me. Not follow an abstract concept. Not follow a list of rules that have been received and handed down from time immemorial.

Follow me. This is eternal life. To know the Father and Jesus, who he has sent, to enter into a deep, personal, intimate relationship.

[6 : 01] That is how Jesus expressed his priority for people. But he expressed it also in political terms. Seek first the kingdom of God and God's righteousness and every other need, every other facet of life will sort itself out if you seek first the kingdom of God.

And that's why when Stephen called me to see what scripture I wanted to have read tonight, I picked on the latter part of Matthew 6. For Matthew 6, along with the other chapters around it, 5 through 7, contained what we call a sermon on the mount.

Matthew's first statement of Jesus' priorities for his people. And right there in the end of chapter 6 is the heart of it all.

To seek first, to seek above all things, God's kingdom. And Jesus, therefore, defines the kingdom. And just prior to that last verse, verse 33, he defines it negatively.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth. The kingdom is not defined in earthly wealth.

[7 : 23] It's not what you have in your bank account or in your driveway. It is not the latest stereo equipment that you have, although who can be against a new Yamaha portable ghetto blaster?

I saw one for \$1,100, and I had to back off from coveting. Stephen knows what I mean. Secondly, the kingdom of God is not built upon duplicity, upon deception, or intrigue, but upon integrity.

The eye is the lamp of the body. Verse 22, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light. If your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. There's a sense there of the potential of duplicity, of trickery, of appearing to be one kind of person outwardly, but inwardly being someone and something else.

Thirdly, the kingdom is not, is not, does not exist where there are loyalties divided between God and any other rival. No one, verse 24, no one can serve two masters.

You cannot serve God and mammon. So Jesus declares, since the kingdom is not dependent upon possessions, materialism, since the kingdom is not defined in terms of your ability to manipulate other people and be tricky or slick, and since the kingdom is not able to be compromised, Jesus says, therefore don't be anxious.

[9 : 05] Don't throw your whole energy, the whole weight of your values and priorities into the things of this earth only. Do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat, drink, and so on and so forth.

Now Jesus is not saying, he is not saying simply be irresponsible. He is not advocating a philosophy in which work does not enter in.

this is not a simplistic view of society in which all of the cultural and social structures are simply to be ignored.

He is saying, rather, that all of those things have a secondary relevance in place, secondary to his kingdom. Seek first, seek above all else, the kingdom of God and God's righteousness and all these other dimensions of life will be yours as well.

So then, what do we mean by God's kingdom? We use the expression over and over again, thy kingdom come. Seek first the kingdom of God. The kingdom of heaven is like this, that, and the next thing.

[10 : 10] But I want to tell you that the kingdom of God is elusive. It doesn't have geographical boundaries. You can't say, here is the kingdom, I'm in it. Here is not the kingdom, I'm out of it. The kingdom almost, and I say this reverently, is like the Cheshire Cat.

It's here and it's not here. It's intense and it's faded. It's focused and it's blurred at different times and in different situations.

The kingdom is partial. It's always mixed up at this point, at least, with other kingdoms. It is now and yet it is not yet. It is present yet it is still to come.

There's a, there's a, a femoral quality to the kingdom, almost a vagueness in one sense. And the expression I like to use is this, that the kingdom of God must be made more intense.

The kingdom of God must be intensified. If you have a can of white paint and you put in a few drops of red, you haven't made much difference, although technically you now have pink paint.

[11 : 15] but if you have a can of white paint and you pour in 20 gallons of powerful fire engine red, you have made that an intensely red mixture.

The kingdom of God is, is elusive, is ephemeral, is intense or faded and our responsibility is to see it where it is and to enable with God's grace it to become more intense.

Let me try to give you my definition of the kingdom of God. The kingdom, by the way, maybe you're wondering where I'm going. I'm going in the direction of ministry and Stephen said I've got 20 minutes.

It's now, I've now been two minutes so I've only got 18 minutes to get to that 20 minute mark. He said every, he quoted John Stott saying every sermon should seem like 20 minutes. Put your hand up when this seems like two hours, okay?

The kingdom of God, my definition, the kingdom of God is any or all of God's creation when it exists under God's rule or God's reign.

[12 : 18] The kingdom of God is whenever any part of creation returns, is brought back under the reign and the rule of God.

God continues to love his creation despite its profound fallenness. despite sin, despite all that is wrong, God continues to love and God's program is to bring his creation back to himself and the kingdom of God exists in those multitude of situations wherever that process is happening.

The kingdom of God because of the fall is always described in terms of new creation, of redemption, of transformation because the kingdom of God is not there by nature.

By nature, creation is fallen. By nature, creation is separate from God. So all those terms of starting over, transformation, restoration, new beginnings, new life, new birth, all of those getting started again terms describe how the kingdom comes into being.

The kingdom of God was established in a limited way in Israel, in Abraham, in Moses, in David, in the prophets. But the kingdom of God was decisively renewed in Jesus of Nazareth.

[13 : 52] Jesus came into Galilee preaching, the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news. The kingdom of God is intimately bound up in Jesus, intimately redefined by Jesus, by his life, by his words, including these in the Sermon on the Mount.

The kingdom of God is intimately connected to his death, his sacrificial saving death, which deals decisively with the power of evil and the strength of sin, which is totally foreign to and totally inimical to the kingdom of God.

No one can serve two masters. It is in the death of Jesus that the mastery of sin is broken. And in his resurrection, the power of God's new life over sin, over evil, and over death is demonstrated and brought into reality.

Jesus, in his resurrection, is the sign, the powerful sign, and the instrument of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is tied up to the sending of the Spirit.

The kingdom of God touches individuals, now Gentiles as well as Jews, as they are incorporated, enfolded into God's kingdom when they repent, when they believe, when they receive the Spirit, all of which baptism stands for and represents.

[15 : 27] So those of you who are old enough to remember the prayer book and its catechism, remember that baptism is spoken of as that occasion symbolically when we became a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom, however, will only be fully realized in the age to come. of God. But whatever we do, whatever we achieve is partial, and it is only in the fullness of time in God's new age, of which the resurrection is the foretaste.

It is only in that age to come that the kingdom of God will be achieved in all of its fullness. But that is not to say that it is not already here in an imperfect, partial, yet nevertheless vitally significant way.

And our mission, God's mission to us, is the intensifying of that kingdom. The kingdom of God includes the church.

But the kingdom of God is not identical with the church, at least not yet. The church, rather, is the agent, the supreme agent of the kingdom of God.

[16 : 44] The church is the supreme chosen agent. of God's kingdom. What is the difference between church and kingdom? Which do you belong to?

Well, the answer is it depends on the time of day. Sunday morning or Sunday evening, you obviously and visibly belong to the church. Well, you belong to the church all the time, but you're conscious right now of your being the body of Christ in the church.

The church exists, in other words, when God's people, not only physically, but when God's people consciously are aware of themselves in relationship to one another.

The church is inward-looking. The church is the people of God united in the body of Christ, with Christ as the head. The church is what we have when we come together.

And when we do that, we come together to worship. We come together to take care of one another. We come together to teach, encourage, rebuke sometimes, chasten, and lead on one another.

- [17 : 53] We come together for our life in Christ. That is the church. The kingdom of God, by contrast, exists when you and I go our separate ways.
- Not forgetting one another. Not denying our continuing relationship one another, but when the focus of our life is upon our involvement with the rest of God's creation.
- When you go home and spend time with your family. When you go to school. When you're at your work. When you're in community activities. When you're by yourself in the world.
- When you write a letter to a member of parliament or when you cast a vote. When you do a thousand and one things and you do them as a Christian in the name of Christ. And where part of creation through your witness and ministry is coming under God's influence.
- There is the kingdom of God. There is the kingdom of God. Do you see what I mean when I say the church, you, me, the body of Christ is a particular agent of that kingdom?
- [19 : 01] As you and I live for Christ in the world. In such a way that the world which God continues to love and care about is touched by his presence, by his healing, is called back to him.
- There is the kingdom of God. You and I, therefore, belong to both. Sometimes we are more conscious of one, sometimes of the other. But the object of the enterprise, the mission to which God has called us, is the total redemption of creation.
- the establishment of God's reign in his world. Not in our own strength, but by the power of God's spirit, the spirit of Christ. A couple of minutes about ministry.
- Ministry is nothing more nor less than the work which goes on both in the church and in the world. world. What goes on in church ministry?
- Worship. We must never downplay that, because that is the great symbolic declaration of who we are in relation to God and who God is in relation to us.
- [20 : 15] To worship, to reverently, humbly, expectantly, joyfully celebrate the presence of God which is intensified as we come together, is awesome work indeed.
- Nurture, fellowship, teaching, encouragement, and so on. I've already mentioned some of those. But what goes on in the world in the name of the ministry of the kingdom? Obviously evangelism.
- Social involvement with other people. Concern for justice. Awareness of people whose physical and social and material and spiritual needs are complex and great.
- They belong to God. They are God's creatures. And how dare we ignore or be indifferent to the hurts of the world if we believe that God is our father and that same God is the creator of those people.
- Our so-called secular work, if God is the God of creation, he is the God who has created so-called secular work. I'd like to change the terminology and say there's no such thing as sacred work and secular work.
- [21 : 29] There is only sacred workers and secular workers. And if you are a committed Christian and you are working in an office, then you are doing sacred work.
- You are doing part of the world's work which is part of God's creation. And the degree to which you do it in consistency with the nature and integrity of God, you are intensifying the kingdom of God.
- Living as an exemplary witness to the love of God, that is part of kingdom ministry. Witnessing by your life, by your words, to the truth of God in Christ.
- That others may believe and be gathered into the fellowship of Christ's church. church. And so the kingdom and the church increasingly overlap. Two problems.
- We've developed, alas, hierarchy as the model of ministry. What is a vocation? Too many people think a vocation is a calling to wear a collar.

[22 : 35] Perhaps to be a doctor. Hardly to be an office worker or factory worker. That's just a job. I believe we need to turn all of that around and say that life lived for God, work done for God is vocational.

And not to distinguish between one particular aspect of that or another. Indeed, God called some people to a particular church-centered ministry of the word.

But that calling is no higher than a person who is called to live for Christ also as a minister of word and witness in a very different sphere.

And vocation is not an individual distinction which applies to some of us, but not many. Vocation is the call of God, the universal call to live the whole of your life in response to him.

I believe that we need to recognize and develop an understanding and a practice of ministry in which ministry of the word is the ministry that we all share in.

[23 : 52] Not all of us will have a public ministry of the word, but all of us is called to give witness to Christ, to the faith that is ours, to the hope that is within us, to the God whom we serve.

And second and finally, we need to work on kingdom lifestyle as well as church lifestyle so that there is a consistency and integrity between the kind of people we are out there and the kind of people we are in here.

Between the kind of people we are when we find ourselves dealing with complex social issues and problems, simply trying to make our way in a hostile and unfriendly environment and the comfort and security of the fellowship of the church.

What kind of a lifestyle are you and I working out such that when we are exercising, practicing it, away from fellowship with other Christians, we nevertheless are bearing witness to Christ. That perhaps is the most significant kingdom ministry that any of us can be involved in.

So tonight I challenge and invite us to renew our sense of belonging as members of the church, the body of Christ, but also people who are called to be instruments and agents of God's larger kingdom, to be people who in word and indeed wherever we are, help to intensify that kingdom of God so that along with our prayer, thy kingdom come.

[25 : 33] So by our lives, God may indeed intensify his kingdom through your life and mine. Let us pray.

We rejoice that Christ, crucified, Christ risen, Christ who will come again, is indeed our King.

We rejoice that in the resurrection we see him already triumphant. We rejoice in his promise that he will bring the fullness of that triumph to completion one day.

And as we both long for that day and live this day, we pray that there may be a harmony and a unity between those two points of focus.

Strengthen us, O God, to live by faith for your kingdom, knowing that all else will fall into line behind it. For Jesus' sake, amen.

[26 : 45] Amen. We'll stand.

And on page three, we stand together with Christians throughout the centuries, throughout the world today, to affirm our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed.

■■■■ly, we believe in one God. The Name of God, 3, S goodwill and all this is chosen as we need. 4, S goodwill and Me, and we believe in one God.

The Lamb, you-ösend God, the Lamb, believe God and the Father. Power from all, lying from on it, true God and true God. God trophy to one name, but one name is the Father, this with him all the things were made.

For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven. By the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary. Amen.

[28 : 12] Amen. Amen.

We will now be praying, following along on page 5 with the responses, and I'll be using those as a guide. So shall we kneel to pray? And listen for the cue at the end of the prayer for the response.

The response is always the same, so it's not too difficult. We pray firstly for our church, almighty and eternal God.

You alone work great marvels. Work a great marvel in our church, we pray, and send down your spirit of saving grace on all Christian people, especially our bishops and other pastors and the congregations in their care, that they may truly please you.