

Kingdom Stories
Week 7: The Vineyard

"I am one in whom Christ dwells and I live in his unshakable kingdom."

This is a phrase we use all the time to bring us back to reality when life gets on top of us. Maybe it's **stress, anxiety, fear, depression or just a sense that this is not how it's supposed to be.** A statement of reality that tells you that there is something bigger than you that cannot always be seen, that is happening right now. **This is a statement of reality in the face of all the bluster the enemy can throw at us using pandemics, Russia invading Ukraine, shortages, economic problems, addictions, and mental illness. All of those things are real, but this statement is foundational and real. It's happening in the margins, behind the scenes.**

Soon Jesus will be gone from them physically, but he will send his spirit. Chapter 18 talks about what the community Jesus wants them to gather into. His presence will unite them into a community, or fellowship, called church.

This new thing, called church, will be an expression of his kingdom.

How then is the church, an expression of the kingdom of God, supposed to operate? That brings us to our parable, or Kingdom Story.

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³ "About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' ⁵ So they went. "He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. ⁶ About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' ⁷ " 'Because no one has hired us,' they answered. "He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.' ⁸ "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' ⁹ "The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who

were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² 'These who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and **you have made them equal to us** who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.' ¹³ "But he answered one of them, 'I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius?' ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? **Or are you envious because I am generous?**' ¹⁶ "So the last will be first, and the first will be last." Matthew 20:1-16 NIV

These are seasonal workers, waiting for work from the landowners during the grape harvest time. **They agree upon what would have been the standard pay for a day's labor**. The workday was split into **three, three-hour increments**, 6:00 am - 6:00 pm.

The first were hired for the whole day, but because the harvest was so abundant, he went back to find more workers. They would have **expected less pay** because of missing the first third of the day. Then, still needing more workers, **went back at 5:00** with only an hour left in the workday.

For day workers, it was **work in order to eat**. If you were waiting in the market at **5:00 pm** then you were **desperate**. You **couldn't wait until tomorrow** or you would have a full day or more on an empty stomach.

The vineyard is always the concrete example of God's kingdom. In the OT it was used to describe the nation of Israel. But then, Jesus came to announce the arrival of the kingdom of God through him. This is when it changed. **Now, the church is the concrete expression of the Kingdom of God**.

If you have been here through this sermon, repeat this after me, **The Kingdom of God is a present reality and a future hope.**

The present reality is where we see God's kingdom in **some very concrete ways through his church**. It is in his church that we see a lot of this next statement.

The Kingdom is the restoration of God's rule and reign here on earth.

It is within this new playground for God's kingdom that we see his rule and reign being restored in people's lives. We also see it when this fellowship of people starts relating to one another in kingdom ways. This is where today's kingdom story comes in.

Jesus is telling this story after an encounter with Peter. Jesus wants to use Peter as a way of teaching how the church is to be an expression of the kingdom operating differently than the way this world operates.

Here's what Jesus is speaking into. ²⁷ Then Peter said to him, "We've given up everything to follow you. What will we get?" ²⁸ Jesus replied, "I assure you that when the world is made new and the Son of Man sits upon his glorious throne, you who have been my followers will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property, for my sake, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will inherit eternal life. ³⁰ But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then. Matthew 19:27-30

This kingdom story is pointed at Peter wanting an advantage by coming, following Jesus first. He is forgetting that Jesus chose him, not the other way around. Also, the advantage of being chosen first is that you have been wandering less and might have less scars or wounds from this evil world. 19:27-29

Peter's attitude is much like the worker who felt the master was being unfair. I can imagine Jesus telling the story like this: "Then the master spoke to one of the workers who had worked all day and was feeling slighted. Let's call that worker Pete." Jesus slowly gazes at Peter.

In the Kingdom, Gratitude is the motivation for serving. This story is not about salvation or eternal life. It is also not about our reward for service, because each received the same amount. It is about what the motivation should be, which is gratitude for what Jesus has done and given to us.

People like Peter, and people like us, need to understand how things work in the kingdom. It's clearly different from the way things naturally work in this world.

I am a poor wretch whom God took charge of, and for whom He has done so indescribably much more than I ever expected...that I only long for the peace of eternity in order to do nothing but thank him." Soren Kiekegaard

That is very different from the person who focuses on all of the bad things God has allowed to happen in my life, that he should have prevented. That is entitlement rearing its ugly head again. That is also different from the attitude that says, **"the church isn't meeting my needs."**

"The person who has received the mercy and forgiveness of God will have the deepest sense of thankfulness for the new life he or she has received and in turn will extend mercy and forgiveness to others as a natural response. The ability to pardon comes from the eternal, loving act of grace in Jesus' sacrifice for our sin. The key to doing this is to stop focusing on what others have done to us and to focus instead on what Jesus has done for us."⁶⁷⁵

Jesus believes that if the church will operate under kingdom principles, they will be different from the culture around them. They will treat one another differently. ²⁵ Jesus told them, "In this world the kings and great men lord it over their people, yet they are called 'friends of the people.'²⁶ **But among you it will be different.** Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant. ²⁷ Who is more important, the one who sits at the table or the one who serves? The one who sits at the table, of course. But not here! For I am among you as one who serves. Luke 22:25-27

It's a problem of focus. The worker is focused on himself, not the generosity or intervention of the landowner or the fortune of the other laborers. (665)

The landowner **brought the worker into his vineyard.** He didn't have to. Then he **paid him a fair wage** that allowed him to eat and possibly also feed

his family. This story is all about the owner of the vineyard who went looking for people to bring into his vineyard and work in his family business.

God invites us to work in his family business and then blesses us with his presence and provision, for now and eternity. That should be enough to make us grateful.

Gratitude toward God will affect not only that relationship, but all my relationships.

Grateful people, living longer and healthier lives. Their perspective runs counter to all of the stuff that would kill us in this world.

Do you love being around entitled people? Those are people who believe they inherently deserve preferential treatment.

The church is where we get to learn this type of gratitude, by practicing it in relationship with one another. If we can do it here, we can do it out there.

In the Kingdom...Gratitude encourages celebrating with others not comparing.

Gratitude toward God for all he has done, is doing, and will do.

Let's read the end of that passage again. ¹³ "But he answered one of them, 'I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius?' ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious (evil eye) because I am generous?'
Matthew 20:13-15

Have you ever gotten the evil eye? It has been also called the stink eye or the mom look. Robin used this powerful evil eye, mom eye, stink eye, on a vacation once. It even crossed language and cultural barriers. We were in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, or as I like to call it, the redneck Riviera. A lot of French Canadians come there to get some sun and warm weather.

There were some young men tent camping next to us. One morning, they were playing rap music really loud, which was pretty common. Live and let live at that point. One morning, the music was in English. The lyrics were perfectly clear to this American mom and were degrading to women. It was on! **The rage in Robin went from 3 to 11.** She came out from under our canopy, walking toward them with a look that could melt steel. I imagine now that she was cooking and had a large knife in her hand. **It was the mom look.** I saw fear in this young man's face. He ran to his boom box and turned it off.

The evil eye in that day meant to look on something or someone with enviousness, or covetousness. It made the greed hidden in a heart now visible. When we focus on something evil, **our eye becomes the entry point of evil that will make its way to the heart.**

Those young men did not need any translation from English to French to understand what was going on in Robin's mind. The master could see through the eye that there was envy.

They had been looking at the grace that these others had received and then translated it into envy. Why? They had received grace by being rescued from starving and brought into the vineyard.

This is a 2-step process.

- 1. Avoid comparing God's grace toward other disciples with what he has done for you.**
- 2. Avoid deciding what someone deserves.** This is way more complicated than we think. It is murky water. It seems simple until you get into it. This brings us to that whole thing with the **speck of sawdust** in your friend's eye, while there is a log in yours.

Here's how it should be. This is the reaction that demonstrates the kingdom. **In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away! Luke 15:10** **Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.** The kingdom on earth is

displayed when we celebrate for others instead of trying to figure out what is fair.

Sam and Dietrich at Universal Studios...but he was a little kid, not a grown adult who should be practicing this attitude within the vineyard, the church.

And we should celebrate when others enter who haven't been with Jesus as long, instead of getting what they deserve.

Let's try to practice this. I will say a name and then you get to picture them accepting Jesus' grace. Here we go...Hitler, Osama bin laden, Putin, your ex, the person who slandered you, your political enemy...or in my case the man who got drunk and killed my son.

The kingdom of God is not a pyramid scheme. You know what that means, right?

I don't deserve more because I got there first.

We act that way about the church. Like we should be served more by the church because we have been here longer and have invested more in it. No, to whom much is given, much is expected. The longer we are in the church, our expectation for what we get should decrease, but the expectation for how much we will serve others will go up.

Example...The Gilded Age TV series. The ones who had been New Yorkers forever wouldn't accept those who had just arrived but had enough money to buy and sell them. But the blue bloods could trace their lineage back to the Mayflower. They were in "Society" while others with more money were not. **Society had to do with who you were and how you behaved. It was a closed circle.**

In the kingdom...rewards for service are a bonus.

That means when things go well after I am obedient to my king. **It does not always go that way, nor was it promised.** We aren't Teflon because of Jesus. That is the non-stick surface in pots, pans, and skillet. We aren't a windshield that has just been coated with rain-ex. **He put us here in this world to be his ambassadors. Ambassador's breathe the same polluted**

air, walk the same dirty streets, and die from COVID or cancer too. We live in a broken world because sin, rebellion against God brought death. In that type of world it, many times, is like the saying, no good deed goes unpunished.

But rewards are mentioned as the byproduct of a life that is free from self-advancement. 675

When I am grateful for what God has done in rescuing me and then I avoid comparison with how he blesses others, that is when it becomes easier to spot how he continues to bless me.

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4:10

We are to turn those benefits of being with Jesus around as opportunities to serve others. I'm a steward of how he blesses me. I'm not a steward of how he blesses you. The biggest blessing is the one we have in common. We were picked up loitering downtown with no prospects and given a life in his kingdom, his vineyard.

The kingdom becomes real for others when they see us live this way.

When the world sees people who are here to serve because of love and don't compare themselves with others, don't envy but celebrate with others when things go well for them...they see the kingdom. When the world sees things like unity, forgiveness, reconciliation, humility, restoration, and loving discipline the kingdom becomes visible to them.

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." John 13:34-35

When we love like Jesus did, then we make the kingdom present for people who are waiting downtown for a break, even those at 5:00, because they are desperate.

We can make the kingdom present because we are an example of what the king can do in someone who is fully trusting in him.

For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve **one another in love**. Galatians 5:13

God has set us free, not just from...But he has set us free to. When you have been loved unconditionally you can risk loving those who may not reciprocate. That's what we talked about in our series on humility. **When you know who you are as a child of God, subject of the king in his kingdom, then you can choose to go lower, to be humble, to serve.**

Responding to Jesus' Kingdom Story

1. Make a plan to serve _____ who doesn't deserve it.
2. I commit to celebrate with baptismal candidates on April 24

Put it in your phone now. If you are a part of Eagle Ridge Church of God and you aren't sick or health compromised you need to be here. (**watching online**) Change your travel plans, whatever, it's that important! We are going to get as many people from Beaverton Campus as possible to come down.

3. Spend a week with this verse.

We are encouraging loitering. Hang out with this verse waiting for something to happen, meaning God to speak.

²⁵ Jesus told them, "In this world the kings and great men lord it over their people, yet they are called 'friends of the people.' ²⁶ But among you it will be different. Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant. ²⁷ Who is more important, the one who sits at the table or the one who serves? The one who sits at the table, of course. But not here! For I am among you as one who serves. Luke 22:25-27

We have a table tent for you to take home. It has the early verse we sent home with you on one side and this one on the other.

