

Where is your happy place? Not necessarily “the happiest place on earth,” unless Disneyland is your happy place. I know some adults even who truly love Disneyland that much. The place where you go that lifts your spirits and restores your soul. You feel at peace, loved, and that everything is in right relationship. The place where God’s love reigns.

In the context of our scripture today, the people are having a theological discussion as they try to sort out the religious laws. The scribe or religious scholar turns to Jesus and asks his take on the discussion of which commandment is the greatest. He answers by saying there are two, because they go hand-in-hand: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (v.30). The second is this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these” (v.31). Because if you love God and others with your whole being then the other commandments take care of themselves. We will honor our father and mother because we love them. We won’t steal or lie or kill because we love.

When the scribe agreed with Jesus that loving God and others is the most important commandment, Jesus said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God” (v.34), a place that is filled with love. Jesus calls us to love God and others in order to bring near the kingdom of God.

Just a few weeks ago, when we talked about James and John who asked to be seated on the right and left of Jesus in his kingdom, they understood the kingdom of God as a physical place. And, even today, some think heaven is the kingdom of God, which is true in a sense. But, the kingdom

of God is more than just the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of God is a return to God’s reign under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, that is lived out in our hearts and actions. It is where “God’s dream for the world is brought to reality.”¹ God’s dream is one filled with love; it’s the story of God’s redemption where Christ’s love reigns over all, and all things are in right relationship. Our happy place.

The love and care for one another is a glimpse of the kingdom of God. Last year, a parishioner in our home church died tragically, leaving behind an eighteen-year-old daughter. The Sunday after the tragedy, I preached a sermon here about planting seeds and watching God grow them. I gave out seed packets for you to plant. Micah asked if he could send his seeds to the daughter. He said, “She could plant them and remember her mother.” He was remembering one of our family traditions where we plant a tree in a family member’s memory when they pass away. I helped him package up the seeds, and he wrote her a note that said he was praying for her. That was a glimpse of the kingdom of God in which Christ’s love reigns.

I was talking with a friend a few weeks ago, and he shared with me that he was surprised how healing it is to pray for people who treat us poorly. They certainly don’t deserve it, and it is a lot easier and more natural to stay angry at them, but in order to be free from their abuse and open ourselves to healing, we make the choice to love. In this case, he prayed for them. And, not like the country song, that sings about praying for their brakes to go out while they are going down a hill, or for a flowerpot to fall off the windowsill and hit them in the head. Real prayer that God will move in

¹ Kim Hammond, *Sentness*, (Westmont, IL: IVP Books, 2014), 100.

their hearts and lives, that God will heal their hearts because they wound others from a place of woundedness. When we pray for those who hurt us, we catch a glimpse of the kingdom of God.

Father Greg Boyle is a Jesuit priest and his ministry is Homeboy Industries in LA that functions as a gang-rehabilitation center. They offer a lot of free services to former gang members, ranging from legal services, mental health services, and tattoo removal. When Father Greg began his work in 1988, he first tried to create peace treaties between the gang members, but soon realized that only fed them oxygen. So, he asked them what they needed to reclaim their lives, and they said a job. So, he and his parish began their hard work in job training and lobbying for them to obtain jobs. This ministry creates a space for them to be redeemed and restored to society while providing support and skills for a better life and a future.

As they got to know these former gang members, they began to see them as victims more than victimizers. In his book, *Tattoos on the Heart*, Father Greg writes, “To love the enemy and to find some spaciousness for the victimizer, as well as the victim, resembles more the expansive compassion of God.”² We can’t quite get this expansiveness with our finite minds, but we can do our part in creating this space when we love God and others. No matter who the ‘others’ are. When we love the Lord our God with all our hearts, minds, soul, and strength, as well as loving others as ourselves, we are bringing heaven to earth. We are bringing the kingdom of God here on earth, God’s dream brought to reality.

Yes, it’s hard to love people who shoot people in synagogues, and churches, and movie theaters, and schools, and grocery

stores. It’s hard to love people who are consumed with hate. But, in reality, with the continuous rhetoric of hate and hate crimes, we are far from the kingdom. We must continue our efforts even more to bring the kingdom near. When we love God and others, the kingdom of God lives in our hearts. We are in our happy place. We are near it when we do our kingdom work to overcome the evils of this world and bring more love and kindness into it. What kingdom work are you doing? Where have you seen glimpses of the kingdom?

We get a glimpse of the kingdom today when we participate in holy communion. We remember Christ’s sacrifice of love for us and we receive his boundless grace when we take the bread and the cup, which is God’s dream brought to reality. United Methodists offer an open table because Christ extends an open table. Regardless of age or faith, Christ invites all to receive his grace.

² Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos of the Heart*, p. 67.