



## November 23 – God’s Kingdom

In March of 2009, I found myself somewhere I never imagined, in an interview with DHS in order to receive aid through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. Some refer to it as “Food Stamps.” For me, it meant I could eat. The congregation I served had closed. The parsonage was sold. There I was being interviewed for the program.

The DHS case worker looked at me with a baffled expression and asked, “Why are YOU here?” I had come straight from part time work at a local congregation, still wearing my clergy collar. I answered honestly, “Because I need help. How can I point others to resources if I am too proud to accept help when I need it?” She agreed, though the look of pity never quite left her face.

The truth is that all of us need help sometimes. There are times when it is a little more profound than other times. Don’t let that fool you. Everyone needs help sometimes. If it is okay to help others, it is okay to accept help from others too.

This conversation between Jesus and the two criminals is a conversation that has taken up residency in my mind. It is a very intriguing conversation. Jesus is at the Place of the Skull and is being put to death. The charge is technically terrorism. That is the charge at the Garden, and before Pilate. This is serious.

There are two other terrorists, one on each side. One of them is mocking Jesus, “If you really are the Messiah, save yourself and us.” You can almost picture the setting as this person lashes out at Jesus in anger, almost taunting him in the hope that Jesus can and will free them all. “If you can....” Maybe ego will get Jesus to do what I want.

There are times in life that are like that, it we are willing to admit it. It is easy to get caught up in the emotion of it all when things are not going the way we would like. Whether anger, grief, fear, you name it. It overwhelms and it is easy to respond the same way, “If you are really there God, prove it! Save me!”

The other criminal stands in stark contrast. He is being put to death, publicly, for his crimes and his response is, “We deserve this.” Karma bites sometimes. But at the heart of his words is the question, “But why are YOU here?” He looks at Jesus recognizing that Jesus should not be there next to them. He is surprised to see Jesus there, on a cross, approaching death. How can Jesus be found to be here?

There are times when this happens too. In our darkest moments, even when we think that all is lost and there is no way forward, we find that God is there with us. That is the beauty of the cross. There is nowhere that our journey through life can take us where God is afraid to meet us. We look over and think, “Why are YOU here?” The answer is simple. Because God loves you. The criminal made a simple request, remember me. Jesus met him with grace and invited him into his kingdom.

When the world sees the word “King,” it is often seen as one with power and authority...even unapproachable. When we speak of Christ the King, we speak of a true king. It is not a kingdom marked by power. It is one led by example, through service and humility. It is a kingdom centered around being the good in the world. All of us need help sometimes. As followers of Christ, we are called to do what we can.

There is a story of folklore coming from Africa, where the men of the community were invited to bring wine that would be poured into a large barrel. One man decided to bring water, thinking there were enough others to overcome one jug of water. When the celebration started, what came out of the barrel was crystal clear water. Everyone had relied on others to provide the wine.

This is a good reminder that each of us is to do our part. All of us have something to offer the world. All of us will need help sometimes. We cannot rely on others to carry the load alone, nor can we be too proud to accept help when we need it. This is what the kingdom of God looks like. Amen.

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