

**Sermon – Sunday, November 20, 2022**

**Rev. Randi**

We're often captivated by movies or TV programs where someone is transported to a world different from what they're used to. Star Trek is one example. A group of people boldly go into another civilization, encountering different cultures and kingdoms. C.S. Lewis's *Lion, Witch, and the Wardrobe* is another example. Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy go through the wardrobe into a foreign kingdom known as Narnia. *Mork and Mindy*, an old TV sitcom, is a third example. An alien comes to earth from another planet to check out human behavior. Mork can be said to have gone from one kingdom to another.

Although we don't have the experience of being transported from one kingdom to another like the *Enterprise* or the Narnia children or Mork, we get a taste of what they experience if we travel or if we have relatives from another culture. Women put on head scarves to visit Middle Eastern countries, for example. Or, in Middle Eastern countries, we find that Friday evening through Saturday evening is the Sabbath. Or we have to learn a new language to visit remote areas of France or Italy. Or our Latin American relatives are never on time, while our German relatives are precisely on time – never early and never late.

Other countries or kingdoms –real or fanciful -- are different from the United States. Customs are different. Languages are different. Philosophies are different.

Jesus is king. Yet Jesus's kingdom is different from the secular kingdom that surrounds us. We think of Jesus's kingdom as coming in the future. Yes, Jesus will reign over all the earth in the future. But Jesus's kingdom also exists in our hearts. And we can, through the Holy Spirit, bring about glimpses of Jesus's kingdom amid the earthly kingdom.

Characteristics of Jesus's kingdom include love, peace, and forgiveness. They include remaining calm and faithful to our baptismal vows despite whatever the secular world throws at us. Jesus provides a great role model for that. He steadfastly continues on the path of crucifixion and resurrection despite being taunted to try to find an easier way. Another characteristic of Jesus's kingdom is compassion for the marginalized. Indeed, compassion for the marginalized in Jesus's kingdom runs so deep as to provide a reversal of fortunes – with the marginalized being powerful and the powerful losing their power.

We bring about the kingdom of God on earth when we act as Jesus did. Here are a few examples:

- Forgiveness. Citizens of the kingdom of God harbor no ill will toward anyone. They've forgiven everyone for anything wrong that has been done to them. Even as Jesus hung on the cross, he forgave those who put Him there.
- Love. Jesus looked at people with great love – even those that members of society turned away from—such as lepers, blind, or “sinners.” Sometimes we find

loving some people to be complicated. Perhaps we have trouble loving unattractive people or mean people or people who are different from us. Maybe one or more of our relatives or ex-relatives is challenging, and we have trouble loving them. Yet, Jesus loved everyone. The culture in the kingdom of God is love.

- Peace. Peace isn't necessarily about war or lack of war. Peace is about a heart that stays calm and focused on God despite the turmoil around it. It's harmony. It is giving our anxieties to God so we can continue to focus on God alone. The psychiatrist Murray Bowen would define it as being fully self-differentiated so that we don't let the anxiety around us bring us to reactivity. Our Buddhist friends would call it Nirvana. We call it the peace that passes all understanding, despite external factors. We move closer to this peace by staying focused and in tune with God rather than focusing on worldly things.
- Compassion for the marginalized. The world's kingdom has a hierarchy. People who are beautiful by society's standards and affluent tend to receive the most opportunities, while people who are homely and poor seem to receive the fewest opportunities. People who are different in any way – color, culture, gender, sexual orientation, intellectual ability – are marginalized. This earthly cycle tends to create even more significant inequities the longer it continues. The more we marginalize people and deny them opportunities, the less likely they will achieve their potential. God's kingdom is different. Jesus seeks out those who are poor, disabled, ill, or outcasts for special attention. That attention from Jesus makes a huge difference in the lives of these marginalized people. Just a few weeks ago, we read about Zacchaeus, for example, and how a visit from Jesus spurred him to make a positive difference in the world. We are called to seek out the marginalized among us and, through the power of the Spirit, give them the special attention they need to become all God calls them to be.

As followers of Jesus, we are citizens of a different kingdom beyond the earthly, secular one. Our citizenship in Jesus's kingdom takes precedence over our citizenship in the earthly realm. We are called to live as citizens of Jesus's kingdom right now. We are called to follow the example of Christ by loving, forgiving, caring for others, and being at peace, whatever our circumstances. This day we can be with Jesus in that paradise kingdom.