

**A Conflict of Desires:
March 13, 2022**

I was talking to a young woman this week... **[1 God]**
Who does not identify...
As a believer in Christ.

She grew up in the Catholic Church...
Where her mother attended.
She said her father was a Christian.

She said her God was a bit different...
Than my God.

She said YOU think...
Pointing to me...
That God is sitting up in the clouds somewhere.
And that someday you will die...
And get to see your God.
Up there.

But... she said...
I see my God...
Here on earth.
On the ground.
In the dirt.
In the trees.
And the mountains.

My God is in nature.

Now...
I wasn't trying to argue with her...
Or to make her believe...
Exactly the same thing...
That I believe.

In that moment...
I was really trying to listen to her...
And understand what was going on...
And hear what she was saying.

But still...
All those years pastor training...
Makes it hard to keep my big mouth shut...

So I did respond.

That I don't believe that God is sitting up there...
On some heavenly throne...
With a crown...
And a humungous white flowing beard.

I believe that's one vision... of who God is...
And God is bigger than that vision.

We... as Christians claim... **[2 In All]**
That God is OMNIPRESENT.
In and through all things.

God is the very force of life...
That animates our existence...
Charges our batteries... if you will.
Gives us life.

Without God... we do not exist.
We are nothing.

Now... the dirt...
And the ground...
And the trees...
And the mountains...
Are all part of God's creation.

And it's true that the impulse of God's life...
Runs through this world.
And if we can't see it...
Then we probably aren't trying to see it.
Because it's everywhere.

You know...
The Hippopotamus Song...
That song we sing at camp...
Has the line that says...

God's fingerprints are everywhere...
Just to show how much God cares.

However... the creation is not God.
God is God.
Creation is Creation.
Creation points to the Creator.
Right?

All that was just background talk...
To get to the question...
I really want to ask today.
Where is God... or more specifically...

Where is the Kingdom of God?

I mean... in John's vision... **[3 Revelation]**
In the book of Revelation...
It seems to confirm...
The young woman's assumptions...

A place...
Up in this sky.
Above the troubles of this world.
Away from this mundane existence.

Where God is large and in charge...
Sitting on the throne...
With the 24 elders...
Sitting to God's right hand and God's left hand.
The leaders of Israel... on one side...
The disciples of Jesus... on the other side.
All the chosen people.
All the main players.
Gathered in that one place...

And oh the angels.
The cherubim... the seraphim.
Flying around... and constantly singing...
HOLY HOLY HOLY...
Is the LORD GOD ALMIGHTY.
WHO WAS AND IS AND IS TO BE.

And a multitude of people.
A literal sea of humanity...
From all nations...
All races...
All languages...

Standing there...
Before the throne...
which BTW is standing room only...
Joining in the heavenly song...
That has no words...
That has no end.

Whew.
That's a lot.
It sounds incredibly intense.

And no offense...
To Linda or the musicians of our church...
But standing there... singing...
For all eternity.

I'm not sure.
I can do it.
I'll probably want to sit down.
And take a rest...
Every now and then.

Or just be quiet.
In the presence of God.

What do you think?

What's your understanding of the Kingdom of God?
Where is the Kingdom of God?

See... the reason I bring it up...
Is because I think that's why Jesus...
Is in trouble in the gospel lesson today. **[4 Jesus]**

Because in his ministry...
He is teaching things...
About the Kingdom of God...
And what it means...
To be a part of that Kingdom.

That are contrary...
The established religion.

That go against the security...
Built into the system...
Over many generations...
To ensure the power...
To make all the decisions...
About where God is and is not...

And the determination...
Of who is inside the club...
Of faith... and who is not.

Is in the hands of...
Well... dare I say it...
Crusty old men.

No offense...
If you consider yourself a crusty old man.

All I mean...
Is the religious establishment of the day.
The Sadducees...
The Pharisees.
The Sanhedrin.
Even the King.

The leaders of the faith.
They controlled everything.

Which was... no matter what anyone else says...
EXCLUSIVE.

Now Jesus... speaking on behalf of God...
Because he was... is... and always will be...
The Son of God.

He was opening up... the Kingdom of God...
To all people.

It was not an EXCLUSIVE club.
Like the religious establishment...
Promoted back in the day.

It was not some unattainable...
Pie in the sky... that Someday...
If you are good enough...
If you are holy enough...
You might just be able to get in.

Jesus did not hold...
That kind of vision...
Of God's Kingdom...
In the world.

In the gospel of Luke Chapter 17... **[5 Midst]**
Jesus is asked...
Again... by the Pharisees...
When the Kingdom of God...
Was going to happen...

And Jesus said...
It doesn't work like that.
You're not going to say...
Look here it is...
Or there it is!

Jesus says... no.

The Kingdom is IN YOUR MIDST.
It's right now...
It's right here...
And you're missing it.

It's God's mercy and love...
Breaking into the world...
Revealed in the words and actions of Jesus...

Which then become...
The principle of our faith...
The basis...
Of life and meaning...
For all who choose to follow Christ.

In other words.
The Kingdom of God...
Is revealed... and lived out...
through Christ...
Who is showing us...
God's greatest DESIRE...
For the world.

And that's the problem.

What we have here...
In today's gospel lesson...
Is a conflict of DESIRES. **[6 Desire]**

The Greek word for desire...
Is THELOS.

That specific word...
Is used three times...
In the gospel lesson we have today.

This lesson is literally...
Filled with DESIRE.
But it's not easy to find.

The first is...
When those old Pharisees...
Came up to Jesus...
And warned him...

Now... I can't speak to their motivation.
Maybe they were being nice to Jesus.
Telling him to get away...
While the getting was good.

But more likely...
They wanted him...
To shut up...
Pack up...
And move on.

So they warned him...
That Herod DESIRES...
To kill him.

Whether or not it's true... **[7 Herod]**
It is the modus operandi...
For the King of the Jews...
Named Herod.

Sure.
He did many good things.
Like rebuilding the Temple...
In the city of Jerusalem.

But... on the other hand.
Herod was not a good guy.

Remember.
He beheaded John the Baptist.
For proclaiming the truth...
About Jesus.

He also killed his own sons...
After he received permission...
From the Roman government.

That's not in the Bible...
But it is from other history books.

Herod was intense.
So it's no surprise...
That this man.
Was the one...
The Pharisees said...
DESIRED to kill Jesus.

Jesus response is so awesome.

He looks at those Pharisees...
And says... you go tell that FOX.
Now this is not a compliment.
He didn't mean Herod was good looking...
He meant he was crafty... sneaky... bad.

He tells them...
He may DESIRE to kill me...
But we don't always get what we want.

Why don't you let him know...
I'm going to be doing my work.
Casting out demons...
Curing sick people...
Living out the Kingdom of God...

Tomorrow.
The next day.
And the third day.

Then... I'll be in Jerusalem.
Where all the prophets go...
To be killed.

Foreshadowing his death...

And now... we get to Jesus' DESIRE. **[8 Jerusalem]**
In the lament... that he speaks.
You can almost feel his heart breaking.

But it's more than just Jesus...
Speaking for himself.
This is the voice of God.
This is the love that God has...
For God's people.
Pouring out of Jesus' mouth.

This is God's heart...
That is breaking.

When Jesus speaks.

Jerusalem... Jerusalem...
That kills the prophets...
And stones those sent to it. **[9 Hen]**

How often have I DESIRED...
To gather you...
Like a mama hen...
Gathers her brood...
Under her wing.

It's a beautiful image...
A mother's instinct...
To love and protect.
To put her own body...
In a direct path of danger...
For the sake of her children.

To be honest...
It reminds me of all the women and children...
Fleeing Ukraine.

But that's beside the point.
The third and final desire is this.

But. Jesus says. **[10 No Thanks]**
You weren't willing.
But the word isn't willing.

You didn't DESIRE.
To be under my wing.
You didn't desire...
To receive God's love and mercy...
For this world.
For you.

I would propose to you all today.
That the Kingdom of God...
Is in our midst...

Whenever... our DESIRE...
Is aligned... with the DESIRE of our God.

When God's will...
Is lived out...
Through us.
Through our Godly words...
Through our Godly deeds...
Through our Godly love.

And I'm not saying...
We are saved by being good.
Don't bend it that way.

I am saying.
God's Kingdom is in our midst.
And when we DESIRE what God DESIRES...
when we live out...
God's love and mercy...
In our lives.

We can see it.
We can feel it.
We can know...
God's Kingdom.
Right here and right now.

Story time. **[11 Bishop Rinehart]**

One time at a theological conference...
Michael Rinehart...
The bishop the Gulf Coast Synod... ELCA....
Told about an experience he had.

Every year...
His church sends a group...
Of adults and kids to Peru...
Where they put on a week-long vacation bible school
At a Peruvian orphanage.

On one of these trips
He got onto a flight to Mexico City.
And discovered that he was
In the middle seat of a row.
I do not like middle seats.
Shoulders are too wide.

Well... turned out... **[12 Middle]**
He was between two, big, burly tattooed guys...
Who were obviously friends...
AND had their arms firmly planted...
On the armrests...

They didn't say the words...
But the message was clear.
Don't even think about putting your arms down during this flight.

He sat squashed between these two large men...
And he thought,
Well, instead of getting mad
Which could be hazardous to his health...
He decided to talk to them. Start a conversation.

So he said, "So, where are you guys going?"

One of them said,
We both work at a medical center...
And we've been saving for this all year.
The man patted his pocket...
And showed a wad of cash.

We're going to Aruba for a week
To lay on the beach,
Drink cheap booze,
And look for women.
Where are you going?

Before he let himself think about it,
He just launched into it:

I'm going with a group from our church to Peru.
We're going to an orphanage
We're going to spend the week
Talking about Jesus
And just loving those kids
And letting them know that
They're not forgotten
And that people care about them
And we're going to have a blast!

The conversation kind of trailed off after that.

But when they landed in Mexico City
Bishop Michael was looking around
Trying to figure out
Where to go next

When suddenly....
One of the big scary tattooed guys
Tapped him on the shoulder,
Pulled out his wad of money,
Started peeling off 20's
And said, "Here ... use this for those kids."

When our DESIRES.
When our hearts.
When our words and actions...

Become the DESIRE...
The heart.
The words and actions...
Of our God.

When they become one and the same.

That's where...

The Kingdom of God is revealed.
And the world is changed.

Thanks be to God.
Amen!