

## “Kingdom Living: Mindfulness”

Luke 10: 1-12

As we continue our Lenten series by talking about awareness and being mindful, I kept coming back to a part of our Scripture today that has bothered me and many others ever since we started this Surfing the Edge journey. It's that last part of our text, the part that talks about wiping the dust off our feet, the part that says it would be better for Sodom on the day of judgment than for this town, the part that makes us squirm in our seats every time we hear this passage.

The thing of it is that we can't disregard or throw out this part of the passage because we don't like it. There is something about the dust shaking and the harsh treatment that we need to struggle with as we continue our journey with what it means for us to practice Kingdom Living. And as I lived with this text this week, I have come to discover that our uncomfortable feelings about this text is because it is making us take a hard look at whether we are really aware or mindful of the Kingdom of God in our midst every day.

Here's why I say this, as I was preparing this sermon this week, I came across a story that is currently circulating around the Disciples World. The story is about a church and their missed opportunity to experience the Kingdom of God in the midst because they were so focused on maintaining the status quo.

And as I have read people's responses to the story, both Disciples and non-Disciples, both believers' and non-believers', it has seemed that it was better for Sodom than for this church, now that the truth has come to light.

Now let's be honest, all churches have skeletons in their closets. All churches have done some things that are not exactly in line with our calling to share the love of God with our neighbors but not all churches have the courage to recognize and claim when they missed out on the Kingdom of God because they were too caught up in their own self-interest like this church has done and given us all an opportunity to realize that the Kingdom of God can come around more than once!

The story begins as this church, wanting to celebrate its 200 year anniversary, began doing a little research into its past. And the researcher came across a story that was not listed in the church's regular chronicles but in the New York Times of all places. The year was 1906 and a certain woman church member who was known for being a "disturber of the peace" began stirring the pot again. She had informally adopted a young black girl as her daughter and had the nerve to believe that this young girl ought to be welcomed at Sunday worship. This didn't go over very well at the church and to make a long story short, the elders dismissed this "disturber of the peace" from the church's rolls. Now a hundred some years

later, the church is making amends by restoring this woman posthumously to membership while honoring her “outstanding life and work.”

Now the first time, I read this story, I thought “great story!” and celebrated the reconciliation and healing that was finally taking place but as I pondered more on this story, my initial response began to change. I began to feel sorry for all parties that were involved. I began to feel sadness because this hurt and this hate had happened in the first place. I began to feel regret because the Kingdom of God had come near for that community of faith through the face of that child and they missed it because they could only see the color of her skin.

Now I know that it is easy for me, some hundred years later, to say that I would have done things differently but to be honest, I don't know what I would have done if I had found myself in the same situation. I live in a different time and different place where certain things and attitudes have changed. What I do know is that this story got me thinking of all the moments when the Kingdom of God came near for me and because I was too caught up in my own stuff, or wasn't really open to God's Spirit at the time, or because I was scared of what would have happened if I had let go and let God, I missed out on something really amazing. And I'm sure that I'm not alone in this realization. All of us can probably come up with a handful of times when the Kingdom of God came near to us and we missed it

because we weren't open to it. We weren't mindful of it. We weren't aware that it was even in our midst.

And that is the true disappointment for us as people of faith. That is maybe why we shift a little in our seats when we hear it would be better for Sodom than for us because we know that there have been times in our lives we have missed out on the Kingdom of God in our lives. And we don't like how that makes us feel.

We feel empty. We feel guilty. We feel like we missed out on something. We may feel like a burned out shell of ourselves, always wondering if there was something we would or should have done differently.

And these feelings will continue until we realize that the good news is that it is not the disciples who make this statement about Sodom. It is not the disciples who have permission to pass judgment on those who reject them. It was Jesus who said it because Jesus knows that the disciples have no right to tell anyone else what will await them if they miss out on the Kingdom of God. The disciples had missed out on it so many times up to this point and would continue to miss out on the Kingdom of God as the journey to Jerusalem continued. They would even miss the Kingdom of God in their midst on their last night together with Jesus when one would betray him, one would deny him, and the others would scatter as soon as the powers that be came to arrest Jesus.

They would miss out on the Kingdom of God All because they would be too afraid to challenge the status quo.

No, it's not the disciples saying this harsh statement. It was Jesus because Jesus knew that even in judgment, there was mercy. Jesus knew that the blessing of God was that God doesn't give up on God's people. God has never given up on God's people and God isn't about to start now. God will keep trying to get our attention and will stop at nothing to bring the Kingdom of God near for us. God doesn't give up on God's people and God isn't about to start now. That's the beauty of it all.

At one moment, we may miss out on the Kingdom of God but then the next, we experience it. The good news is that the Kingdom of God is not a one and done type of thing. It is not some far off place that we hope to get to one day. The Kingdom of God is a part of our everyday lives here on earth. It is a part of every moment of our lives. It is in our midst each and every day, waiting for us to become aware of the grace, the peace, and the life-transforming gift that awaits us.

The Kingdom of God is happening right now. It is on our doorsteps, waiting for us to open the door, waiting for us to become aware of the opportunities of growth and grace that await us, waiting for us to live life to the fullest and become the people that God created us to be.

The good news is that as part of Kingdom Living, we aren't waiting for the end of time to experience all this. We are called to live as though we are already a part of the Kingdom of God here on earth and enjoy the glimpses that we catch of it along the journey.

Jesus shares this harsh statement with us to shake us up, and to wake us up so that we will realize that there is so much more to life than we are experiencing. Jesus is telling us that we are going through life with blinders on, only focusing on getting ahead, only focusing on completing our next task, only focusing on maintaining the status quo.

Jesus wants us to realize that Kingdom Living is about so much more. It is about awareness, awareness that we are connected with the earth, awareness that we are connected to one another, awareness that what we do and say have consequence for the good and for the bad. The Kingdom of God is about taking risks. It is about letting go and letting God. It is about sharing the love of God with our neighbors even if that means doing something that we are not comfortable doing, even if that means becoming vulnerable to others, even if that means sharing our story of missed Kingdom opportunities and the grace that was shown to us when the Kingdom of God came around again.

Kingdom Living calls us to become mindful of God in our midst, to realize that God is within and without, that God is everywhere and that God is a part of everything.

All we have to do is open our eyes and be ready to experience the grace and growth that awaits us. All we have to do is become aware that the Kingdom of God is in our world right now, waiting for us to respond. All we have to do is become mindful of the many times and the many ways that God is trying to get our attention.

The Kingdom of God is near.

May we always be aware of it as we practice Kingdom Living by centering our lives on God and serving others. Amen.