

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who shows us the Kingdom of God here and now, Jesus Christ our Savior and our Lord, amen.

I remember playing hide and seek as a child. (SLIDE) It was great fun. I was never very good at hiding, but I loved being the one to go looking for everyone else. I would finish counting, so quickly my friends said I must have skipped a few numbers, but I just counted really fast... Then I would announce at the top of my lungs, “READY OR NOT, HERE I CAME!” When our granddaughter, Emery was about 3 years old she always wanted to play Hide and seek. She could never stay hidden though. If you didn’t come and find her within a few seconds, she’d come out from behind the curtain or from behind the recliner chair and announce, “Here I am!” It was like she couldn’t wait to be found.

I think we’re all a lot like that. I mean we all want to be found. (SLIDE) The alternative is to remain separated from God, from those we love, and to be all alone. Almost every day I see folks poking their heads out from behind a curtain of pain and sorrow. Every word, every gesture is like they’re crawling out from behind a rock or a hard place where life’s circumstances have had them penned in. If you’re the one hiding, or the one seeking, or even the one sticking your head out you’re your hiding place, ready to be found, one thing is certain, ready or not, here comes the Kingdom of God! When Jesus began his earthly ministry, that’s the first thing he announced, “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near!” (SLIDE)

That's how Martin Luther took it, anyway. In his explanation of the Second Petition or the Lord's Prayer in his Small Catechism, Luther says this: "The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer..." In other words, "Ready or not, God's kingdom is coming." It's happening, with or without our prayer. "But we pray in this petition," Luther goes on to say, "that God's kingdom may come to us also." We're praying that God's kingdom, His reign and rule, would become personal and real in our own lives. And it does. God's kingdom does come to us by grace, because God reigns.

When we talk about the kingdom of God, there are three ways we might consider His reign and rule. First is called the kingdom of power. (SLIDE) This is God's rule over all of Creation. God made it. God sustains it. God keeps it together. God does all this in spite of creation's rebellion against Him. The second way we can think about God's reign is what we call the kingdom of grace.

(SLIDE) This is His reign in and through Christians. The Holy Spirit ignites a faith within us to repent and trust in Jesus as our Lord and as our Savior. Because of God's free gift of the Holy Spirit within each of us, we can live sanctified lives. All that means is that God considers us to be pure and Holy simply because the Holy Spirit lives in us. We live in that grace until Christ comes again, which brings us to our third kingdom. The kingdom of glory. (SLIDE) The kingdom of glory is God's reign in eternity when God will reconcile all things to Himself.

While our eternal life in Christ has already begun, we won't fully experience the kingdom of glory until Jesus returns; on the last day, in the resurrection.

Now, whenever we look at these three (SLIDE) the kingdom of power, the kingdom of grace, and the kingdom of glory—we see they're very much intertwined. God reigns in Christ Jesus and Jesus came to do kingdom work. In His first message in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." In other words, the kingdom of God, the reign and rule of God is right here, right now, and can be found by looking at Jesus Christ of Nazareth. It's like Jesus was saying, "Ready or not, here I come." From there on, Jesus goes on doing kingdom work. (SLIDE) He displays authority in the Kingdom of Power walking on water, calming storms, feeding thousands upon thousands, and healing a broken and diseased world. He displays authority in the Kingdom of Grace (SLIDE) as He forgives sinners, as He chooses to not condemn, as He proclaims a message of love and compassion, as He seeks the lost of this world, and as He promises the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. He even displays His authority in the Kingdom of Glory (SLIDE) through His very presence among us as He reveals to us in so many parables, what the Kingdom of God is like... Jesus raises the dead to life giving us a glimpse of eternity with Him. This is God's Kingdom of Glory.

In a variation of the old Hide and Seek children's game, Jesus sends His disciples out to do kingdom work, too. (SLIDE) They, and we, get to proclaim a message of good news, just like Jesus did 2000 years ago. We get to pray for healing, feed and clothe the least of these among us, and care for all of creation that God loves. Jesus' whole ministry, even through His disciples, is all about kingdom work—bringing the reign of God to bear on a lost and rebellious world.

It was precisely this kingdom work that would bring Jesus to a cross. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,” Jesus had said. So, they decided to put Him to the test, but we know how the story ends! His kingdom is not OF this world, it doesn't look like anything this world had ever seen! His kingdom is not of this world, but it is OVER this world and it is FOR this world. (SLIDE) God desires all people to be saved. Jesus died for all the world, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. His kingdom is not OF this world, but it is FOR US, and His kingdom comes THROUGH US now, too!

You see, we are kingdom people, now. We are sons and daughters of the King! In Baptism, we have been given a “noble birth.” As Saint Paul says in 1st Corinthians, chapter 1, “...not many of you were of noble birth...” Emphasis on the past-tense word, meaning the opposite is true, now. You weren't of noble birth, but now you are! (SLIDE) Now, you have royalty running through your veins!

We are kingdom people, now and as such, Jesus calls us to live as citizens of His kingdom. So, our real home, our true citizenship is not of this world, as Jesus famously told Pontius Pilate. If we're citizens of the Kingdom of God that Jesus says is not of this world, what does it look like when Jesus followers live and work in this Kingdom?

Well, the 10 Commandments might be a great place to start to look at how to live as Kingdom people. That's where Martin Luther started with his Small Catechism. (SLIDE) To summarize the 10 Commandments, Jesus said to love God and love your neighbor as yourself. Care for them. Speak well of them. Protect them. Basically, live out your calling as a redeemed child of God in any and every situation in life. Our Kingdom work involves serving the physical as well as the spiritual needs of our neighbor. Now, not everyone is a pastor, but we all still have the responsibility of caring for the physical and spiritual needs of those around us. There are a lot of people out there looking to be found. There are a lot of people, even in these pews, who need to experience the love of Jesus in a new way.

Dieterich Bonhoeffer wrote of the Kingdom work of the church in this way. He said, "The church that does not exist for others is no church at all." See, as kingdom people, a kingdom of priests, we exist for others. When we pray, "Thy kingdom come," we're praying for a few things all at once. (SLIDE) We're asking

for God's kingdom of power to work in Creation. We're asking for His kingdom of grace to come to us by His Spirit, that we might live sanctified, holy lives. And we're asking for Jesus to return soon, in His kingdom of glory, that we might enjoy eternity with Him. We're asking for even more. When we pray, "Thy kingdom come," we're also praying that others be brought into the Kingdom, by grace through faith. We're asking God to use us personally, to use this congregation as a whole, and to use this Church Building as our tool to bring them in.

So, again, how do we do this? How do we live as kingdom people? Well, Jesus came proclaiming the Good News, and helping others. He sent His disciples out to proclaim the Good News, and to help others. Guess what He's calling us to do, now... To proclaim the Good News, and help others. To simply be the living Body of Christ, living our individual vocations, caring for the needs of those around us. To exist for others. That's why our ministries here at Trinity are so vital. We're not just helping others who are less fortunate, we're doing Kingdom work.

(SLIDE) May the Lord bless the work and ministries of this congregation. May the Lord continue to raise up new leaders to face the challenges of each new day. May your Kingdom come and may we be included as God's workers as we proclaim for God, Ready or Not, Here we come! Amen.