



The Realm of God is Within You

Wildwood Mennonite Church // September 6, 2020

Worship Leader: Denise M // Music Leader: Marg E // Sermon: Joe H

Welcome to Wildwood

Good morning Wildwood. Today's theme is "The Realm of God is Within You" continuing on the themes of the past Sundays of "The Realm of God..." As the days are getting shorter, the temperature is changing and the plants are changing colour - it's easy to see the Realm of God outside of ourselves. But today the focus is on the realm of God within you. Join with me in listening and hearing this lesson for us all today.

Music For Meditation // [Morning Has Broken](#) // MonaLisa Twins

Call to Worship // Hymnal Worship Book #674

Dear God, our friend,
we come to worship you today.
We come to sing, pray, and listen.
You hear us. Help us to hear you.
Amen.


Prayer for Truth and Reconciliation

The words 'Truth and Reconciliation' are weighty words. They suggest an issue being openly addressed in order to find resolution and new beginnings.

This week, two former residential schools have been designated as National Historic Sites. They have been named, not as something to be celebrated but, as a reminder that this part of our Canadian history has left a painful legacy. May the acknowledgement of generational trauma that ensued these experiences, open the way for many to find healing and hope in their lives.

Let us pray:

God of healing and hope, we come to you from a place of privilege. Most of us grew up in homes with caring families until we were old enough to launch out on our own. We had no idea that Indigenous children were being taken from their homes and placed in residential schools far from family and home communities. We had no idea that while we were being rooted in caring communities within our faith traditions and culture, they were uprooted and being denied who you had created them to be.



We acknowledge there have been times when we didn't want to hear any more stories of injustices done to First Nations people by settlers that preceded us. At the same time, we are aware that we have carried unhealthy attitudes toward descendants of residential school survivors who lacked solid family foundations and struggled to thrive. Forgive us, O God, for hiding behind aprons of privilege. Forgive us for attitudes that have not reflected your love and grace.

You have shown us, O God, what is good and what you require of us: to act justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with You. Give us vision, courage and strength to do the reconciling work you wish to see in our lives and with our Indigenous brothers and sisters.

We pray in the name of Jesus, our teacher and guide. Amen

Offering Prayer // Hymnal Worship Book #751

Generous God,
you gave us life;
now we give our lives back to you.
We present ourselves;
our work and play,
our joys and sorrows,
our thoughts and deeds,
our gifts and resources,
to be used by you
for the sake of all people everywhere,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

Song // [How Great Thou Art](#) // Voices Together

Children's Story // [Click here for video storytime with Phyllis G!](#)

Today's story is [Franklin's New Friend](#) written by Paulette Bourgeois and illustrated by Brenda Clark.

Scripture // Luke 17:20-21 // *Inclusive Bible* translation

The Pharisees asked Jesus when the reign of God would come. Jesus replied, "The reign of God doesn't come in a visible way. You can't say, 'See, here it is!' or 'There it is!' No—look: the reign of God is already in your midst."

Sermon // "Swimming in the Realm of God" // Joe Heikman

(If you'd rather watch than read, [click here for the full video version](#) on youtube)

"The Reign of God is within you." (Luke 17:21)

You know, we've been preaching about the Realm of God, the Reign of Heaven, all summer, and I don't think I've ever really defined what I mean by that term.

What is it, where is it, when is it, and how would we even know it if we saw it?

I suppose it's not really an accident that I haven't defined the term, because it's something that Christians have never really been in agreement about, all the way back to the first followers of Jesus.

For some, the Reign of God was a literal kingdom with lands and laws and institutions, built on the foundations of the ancient Kingdoms of Israel and Judah, or perhaps a future political kingdom that the followers of Jesus were meant to establish and participate in on earth.

For some, the Reign of God was about religion, a set of beliefs and practices, a community that existed within, or perhaps separate from, political kingdoms.

For some, the Realm of God was a heavenly kingdom, a reality above and beyond the kingdoms of the earth, where God directly reigned, a reality that would someday be united with the earthly followers of Jesus.



For some, the Reign of God was a spiritual reality, an powerful-but-intangible dimension that surrounds us and influences us without being directly observable most of the time.

For some, the Reign of God was a symbol, a metaphor for faith, an individual and collective way of being, a way to talk about the core of Jesus' teachings.

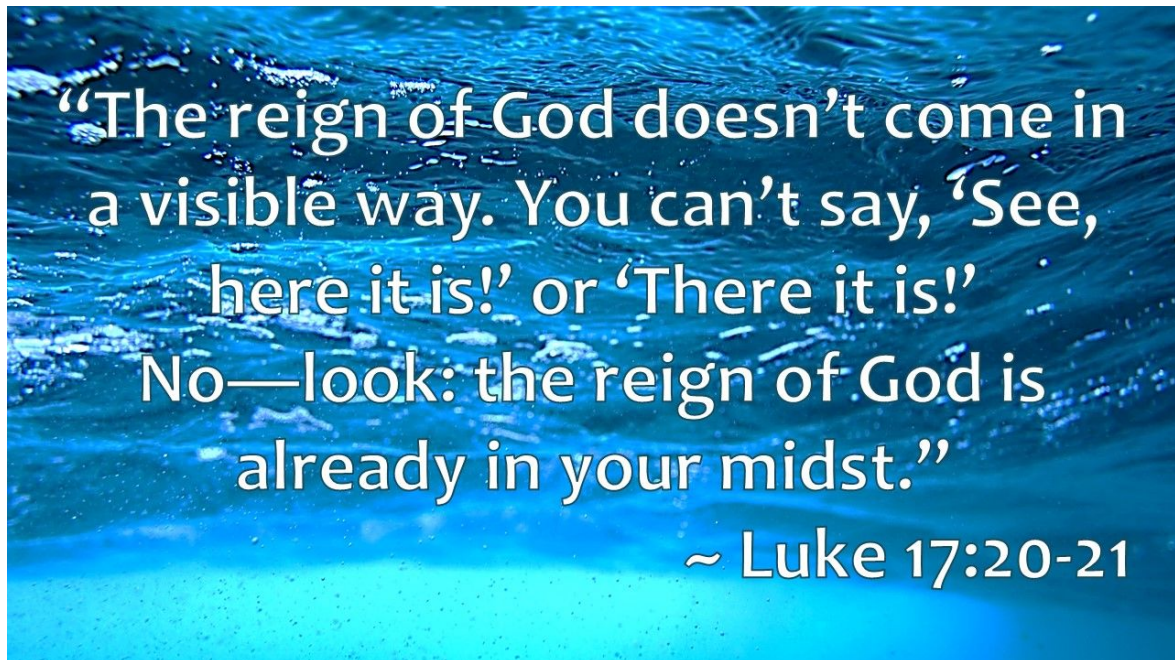
And for some, the Realm of God is a mixture of several of those things, a little of column A, a little of column B, maybe check off that "All of The Above" tab just to be on the safe side.

Which is all fine and good. I find that Jesus used the idea of the Reign of God quite flexibly in his teachings, and there is merit to all of the perspectives that I've listed.



But even with the abundance of options for understanding, or perhaps because of the abundance of options, the Reign of God ends up being a vague, abstract concept. Even with all the earthy, folksy wisdom of the parables that we've been reading together, it's hard to nail down exactly what the Reign of God means for our daily existence in 2020.

Especially when we read what Jesus said in today's scripture reading, that



"Entos hymon estin" in the Greek. The reign of God *"in you is."*

You can't see it, you can't point to it. But *"in you it is"*

Here again, there are multiple ways of understanding.

Some translations say *"within you,"* the singular *"you,"* the reign of God is somehow inside of me as an individual.

Others translate it as *"among you,"* the collective sense, in the way that we talk about the church collectively as the *"Body of Christ,"* the reign of God somehow exists in the relationship between me and you, in our community.

And others go with something like the Inclusive Translation that we read, the Reign of God is *"in your midst,"* it's transcendent but intimate, it's close, it's all around us.

Again, I think all of those are legitimate understandings. But what does that actually mean for me?

Especially in 2020, when a lot of the time it sure doesn't feel like the Realm of God is *within* me, or *among* us, or *already in our midst.*

As I've been wrestling with this this summer, I keep coming back to one of the best sermons I've ever heard, preached by a writer named David Foster Wallace.

Actually, it's not a sermon, but a commencement speech that Wallace gave at a notoriously secular liberal arts college in the States in 2005.

And David Foster Wallace was not exactly a Christian, to my knowledge, and as you'll hear in his speech, he says explicitly that he's not talking about religion or spirituality.

And yet, he gives one of the most clear, practical explanations of the Realm of God that I've ever heard.

So I'm going to play a shortened version of "This Is Water" by David Foster Wallace. Keep in mind that he's talking to a bunch of brand new university graduates, trying to give them a sense of what will make a meaningful life.





THIS IS WATER! by David Foster Wallace

Char Mosley • 428K views • 6 years ago

As we start our #dayinadayout journeys. Take time to #reflect and appreciate the small things. Your struggles are not exclusive and ...

Due to copyright restrictions, the script for this video cannot be included here.

You can watch the video on youtube here: ["This Is Water" by David Foster Wallace](#)

Or, you can read the full text of Wallace's speech here: ["This Is Water" - Full Transcript](#)

Jesus told a story, [in Luke chapter 14](#), about a great banquet feast. The host sent out invitations to all the important people, "Please come, everything is ready and it's going to be amazing!"

But the invited guests began to make excuses. The first said, "I have just bought a new piece of property and I simply must go see it, please accept my regrets."

Another said, "I just purchased five new teams of oxen; I can't come because I have to break them in!"

And another said, "Please excuse me, it sounds lovely but I just got married, and... you know how that is."

Having been rejected by his friends of polite society, the host instead threw open their doors. "Go out into the streets and invite anyone who will come! Bring the outcasts, the poor, the disabled, strangers, anyone who is passing by. This will be a great party, and those who refused to come will miss the whole thing."

If the Realm of God is that kind of party, how is it possible to miss out on the great feast in our lives? What could be so important, so urgent, so diverting that we would fail to see the Realm of God, the beauty and wonder and amazement of a world "on fire with the same force that lit the stars" all around us?

And yet, we do. We get overwhelmed by our fears, of illness and loss and death. We get distracted by the stress of earning a living, the daily struggle for meaning and purpose. We get outraged by the injustice of the world, and beaten down by our inability to do anything about it. We grow numb because of the constant stream of bad news, of entertainment, of so much data that we hear numbers like 870,000 people dying around the world from Covid-19, and we shrug that "at least it's not that bad here."

And yet, even when we're too busy and numb and overwhelmed to see it, *the Reign of God is already in our midst.*

How can we possibly believe that, with all that is going on in the world?

For me, it comes down to what David Foster Wallace describes as "the work of choosing," of awareness that I am not the center of the world, that my perspective is so very limited. I can only see the Realm of God when I get outside of myself to see God in *everything*, in the whole of Creation, and in the pieces of it that are right in front of me.

The world is meaningful and sacred, all of it, even in 2020. The sacred is undeniable, the beauty and wonder are self-evident. But like anything that is self-evident, it is only evident if you choose to look at it and to see it on those terms.

This is not an easy choice, much of the time. "Freedom" isn't quite the right word to describe the struggle that it takes sometimes to make that choice. Even that grounded, hopeful voice in the video was silenced several years later when David Foster Wallace lost his life to suicide.

As Wallace said elsewhere in his speech, "The whole trick is keeping the truth up front in daily consciousness."

I find that is tough to do as an individual. That's why I think Jesus keeps holding up the Reign of God as a collective effort, a community that together holds onto that perspective, that reality.

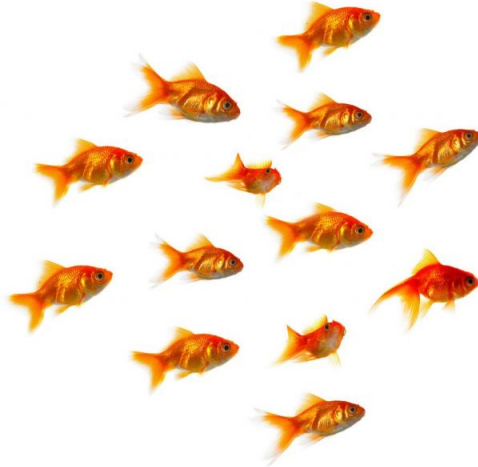


So, even as we enter yet another season of less-than-ideal circumstances for sharing life together as a church community, even as we're bored and frustrated with Zoom church and music videos and social distance guidelines and Covid-bubbles and cohorts, I hope you'll keep finding ways to come back to this place, where we earnestly and graciously and stubbornly keep on naming the sacred fire of the universe. Where we insist on infusing the mundane with meaning. Where we celebrate the "mystical oneness" and goodness of all things, in faith, hope and love.

The Realm of God is within you, among us, already here in our midst.

This is Water.

Amen.




Song of Response // [Simple Gifts](#) // Yo-Yo Ma and Alison Krauss

Sharing Time // ["Hey Wildwood..." online sharing](#)

Not hearing from one another in person through the Sharing Time is a significant loss for many of us. It's not the same, but one way to express your grief, anxiety, prayer requests and gratitude is through the "Hey Wildwood" link above. If you're able, join us for our Sunday Morning Zoom gatherings, or check your email for the sharing items from last Sunday. Or maybe now would be a good time to pause your reading to call someone from church or elsewhere that you haven't heard from this week.

Congregational Prayer

Merciful God,
your love for us makes us bold to join our prayers with all who need your help.
We bring our prayers to you today.
For those who suffer pain;
For those who struggle with limits of body and soul;
We also bring prayers of thanksgiving and joy.



Come Redeeming God,
take these sufferings upon yourself and transform them.
Be merciful also to us, who offer these prayers, so that we might enter the sufferings of others
and become agents of your healing love.
Amen.

Song // [Amazing Grace](#) // Hymnal Worship Book #143

Benediction

May our Lord Jesus Christ, God our Father and God our Mother,
who has shown us such love,
and in their grace has given us
such unfailing encouragement and so sure a hope,
still encourage and strengthen you
in every good deed and word.
Amen.