

Practicing Kingdom Realities

by Linda Rex

October 15, 2023, Proper 23 | After Pentecost—Over the years, I have come to see the kingdom of God and the second coming of Christ through a new lens and that is the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and reign of Jesus Christ. When examined through this new lens, these concepts take on a more paradoxical form and require that I live in a place where I must daily walk by faith, trusting in the near and faithful presence of Jesus in the Spirit.

The biblical concept of the kingdom of God revolves around the Trinity. God reigns over all, yet not all of us acknowledge nor submit to his reign in our hearts and lives. God gave humans the stewardship of his creation here on earth, but so often, we have lived as though we were self-sustaining, self-directed lords rather than simply stewards and creatures whose dependency and livelihood are utterly contingent and dependent upon the God who made us and who sustains us.

We find that our Triune God resolved this issue (as he had always intended to) by coming in the Son of God, the Word of God, into our cosmos as God in human flesh. His coming-and-presence, or *parousia*, was by the incarnation, and he preached the coming and presence of the kingdom of God in his person. In Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension and in the sending of the Holy Spirit, we as human beings begin to participate by faith in the kingdom of God, right now through the Lord Jesus Christ by his Holy Spirit. We find ourselves today in the already-not-yet of the kingdom of God, which is present by the Spirit today but will come in its fullness when Jesus establishes the new heaven and earth.

When the apostle Paul talked about living in unity, bearing the fruits of the Spirit, and rejoicing in every circumstance in Philippians 4:1-9, he used the expression “in the Lord” or “in Christ Jesus.” Fundamental to our ability to walk in love or gentleness is Christ's indwelling each of us by his Spirit. We participate by his Spirit in Jesus' own love and life, living and working together in unity by helping one another and praying for one another. But even our prayers are merely a participation in the ongoing face-to-face conversation between the Father and Son in the Spirit. Jesus offers the things of God to us by the Spirit and offers our response to the Father in the Spirit. By the Spirit, the God of peace is in us and with us in the midst of whatever circumstances we find ourselves, so there is no need for anxiety or distress. We give thanks and rejoice instead, because Christ's own gratitude and joy is ours to experience and share with others.

Paul says, “Let your gentle spirit be known to all.” This is the same language he uses elsewhere that seems to be a passive statement: “Be filled with the Holy Spirit.” There is a sense of receptivity, of being open to what is happening rather than ignoring, resisting or pushing back. We are given God's Spirit freely, but if we are so busy doing everything ourselves and refuse to allow God room to work, we may not experience the wonderful blessings of God's indwelling presence, our union with God in Christ, and his transforming work. And as we close ourselves to what God may want to do, then others will not see the beauty of Christ living in us and shining through us.

Lately, I've been pondering the journey I have experienced over the years in my own walk with Christ. How often it has been about getting the rules right or trying to earn the love and favor of God and others! How sad that I could not simply receive the love and grace of God and allow him to do all the heavy lifting, and focus on enjoying life in relationship with God and others in the Spirit by participating in all Jesus has done, is doing, and will do in bringing his kingdom into reality here on earth as it is in heaven.

Paul reminds us that our life is intimately bound up in Christ's life with the Father in the Spirit. As he said in Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but

More devotionals may be found at <https://lifeinthetrinity.blog>

Subscribe to Our Life in the Trinity YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/@ourlifeinthetrinity>

Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (NASB). We live even now in the reality of God’s kingdom being realized in us and in our world by Jesus in the Spirit, and we participate as we practice these kingdom realities in our lives, keeping our minds on what is excellent and worthy of praise, rejoicing in all situations, and gratefully offering our requests to God, day by day. And we diligently practice loving God and one another as we wait in joyful expectancy for the fullness of God’s kingdom in all its glory.

Lord, thank you for your abundant gifts, most especially your indwelling presence by the Spirit, who enables us to participate in your own face-to-face relationship with your Father. I open myself up to the warmth and healing of your love and life, and welcome you here. Clear out anew the cobwebs and filth that may be gathering that you, my dear Father, may feel at home and welcome always, through Jesus your Son in the Spirit. Amen.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” Philippians 4:1–9 NASB