

The Rev. Lisa Graves
The kingdom is near
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The desperate mother
had just been discharged
from the hospital.
She was already living
hand to mouth
and she couldn't afford
the follow up care
they recommended.

She rushed through
the discharge process
and walked to the police department
to ask about her car.

Her car was old
and unreliable.
She couldn't count on it
to make it across
the county line,
but it mostly got her
to work and back.

Minimum wage
barely kept air in the tires,
gas in the tank
and her three kids fed.
This day, she sobbed
as she heard her car
had been towed.

It had been parked
too long on the streets
during her unexpected
hospital stay.
She need almost \$120
to get it out
of the impound lot.

She needed that car
to get to work the next day.
In spite of her injuries,
if she didn't make it to work
she'd lose her job.

She didn't have the money.
Sitting on the bench
outside the police department
she closed her eyes
and prayed.

And then she began walking.
Every church she passed
she stopped in and asked.
She was embarrassed but steadfast.
She told her story over and over.
She didn't ask for cash,
she asked for a check
made out to
the impound department.
She called the police department
At every church to prove
her story was legit.

In the end, more than
5 churches agreed

to pay a check
to the police department
to help her get her car out.

More often than not,
she prayed with
the good Samaritans
that staffed the offices
and prayed in the pews.
And by the end of the day,
the impound fee
had been raised.
The kingdom of God
had come near.

The kingdom of God
is stored in broken vessels,
carried by stained
and injured hands,
offered by those
with less than perfect pasts
and inconsistent faith.
And received with gratitude.

The kingdom of God
is not a destination
for the after life.
The kingdom of God
is the active faith
of those who follow Jesus
as it bumps into
the ordinary lives
of those it meets.

Matthew, Mark and Luke

all agree that Jesus
sent the 12 apostles
out in pairs
to spread his gospel.
But only Luke gives us
today's account of the 70 –
who are sent out
in Jesus name
to preach, teach and heal.

This marks an important change
in Luke's gospel story.
Until now,
Jesus has been
the main event.

The preaching teaching
and healing
have all been
through his personal
touch and presence.
But now he has authorized
his followers to do the same,
first with the 12
and now with the 70.

They are given
the authority to cure the sick,
expel demons
and bestow shalom,
or God's peace.

And they are given
courage to do so
in vulnerability and poverty.

According to Elaine Heath,
“Everything about
the apostolic mission,
in other words,
subverts the systems
of power and privilege
in the world.”

What may not be
so obvious in this gospel,
because it is so rich
with meaning,
so full of nuance and import
is that God’s peace,
God’s good news
is being taken into the world
in the persons
who follow Christ.

They are not given books
or creeds or pew cards
(and you know I love pew cards)
to hand out to the towns
they travel through.

They are not told
to offer free bibles
or to construct stadiums
and rouse the faithful
to witness and make promises.

No. They are told
to practice the
evangelism of presence.
They are to take God’s peace,

contained in their very life,
and share it with
those they meet.
They are given nothing
to take with them.
They are given no script.
They are given no money.
They are sent instead
To the world that does not know them,
with Jesus' full confidence
and authority.

And it works.
They go off to personally deliver
the kingdom invitation
to everyone they meet.

Now, just because
the kingdom comes near,
does not mean it is accepted.
Jesus tells them
to spare the curses
and merely shake
the dust off their feet
and move on
when they are not welcomed.
But they are to tell the people,
the kingdom of God
has been near you.
The kingdom of God has come near.

Think about your own long life.
Every life feels long
when viewed from the present.
We have all of us

been given choices
and opportunities.
Sometimes we have chosen well.
Sometimes, in hindsight
we regret those choices.
There are people and circumstances
that we may view now
with wonder or suspicion.

There are moments we feel,
the kingdom came near
and we did not offer welcome.

Surely each of us
has turned away
from a kingdom moment
a time or two.

But here's the good news
of this good news.
The kingdom
is not a destination,
it is a presence.
We strive to live
in the kingdom,
which means we strive
to live our lives
in the true presence
of Christ, in faith
and peace.

When we are living
in that sweet spot,
we bring the kingdom
with us as we go about

our lives.
In the grocery store,
the bank line,
at work,
as we watch the kids
or attend a workshop
or work in the yard.

We become the kingdom
for others.
In the same way,
faithful strangers
and even loved ones
bring the kingdom to us
in a new way.

Sometimes we deny the kingdom
out of selfishness,
or exhaustion
or pride.

But our God
is not a God of single chances.
The kingdom
comes around again,
in the help of a stranger,
the soft kiss of a young child,
the understanding
found in the eyes
of a friend.

This day is a wonderful day
to pay marked attention
to kingdom living.
On this holiday weekend,

you will be surrounded
by kingdom keepers
and those who desperately need
the kingdom to be near.

Pay attention to the places
you instinctively
feel the kingdom.
Look for those faces
that seem to be searching
for God's peace,
and see what you can provide
from what you have
been given in your soul.
And if you're willing,
Share your kingdom stories
here or in your home.

On this day
when we often ask
for God's blessing
on our country,
let us also ask for
God's kingdom to live
deeply and richly
in those who live
in our good home.

Let us ask that God's peace
be richly received
by those who
desperately need it,
those who have not
always welcomed it,
those who will gladly

pass it on. Amen.