

■ What's New

■ Worship

■ Activities

■ Teens

■ Community Support

■ About Us

Timothy Eaton Memorial Church

[prev](#) | [next](#)

[Home](#) | [Worship](#) | [Lenten Reflections](#) | April 15, 2000

- [April 9th](#)
- [April 10th](#)
- [April 11th](#)
- [April 12th](#)
- [April 13th](#)
- [April 14th](#)
- [April 15th](#)

The Kingdom of God Within — Luke 17:20-21



Saturday, April 15, 2000
Margaret Terry

God's kingdom isn't something you can see. God's kingdom is here with you. Luke 17:20-21

The Pharisees asked Jesus when God's kingdom would come. The Pharisees were one of the principal parties in Judaism, whose existence dated from as early as 162 BC. They stood for the development of a holy "true Israel" and the development of the synagogue. On one hand, they represented the common people and de-emphasized class differences, yet they were selective about who should qualify for inclusion in God's kingdom. Jesus portrayed God's kingdom as offering **unconditional** forgiveness to **all** - Jews, Gentiles and sinners alike. This put Jesus and the Pharisees somewhat at odds. Jesus said that the Pharisees didn't practise what they taught; they laid heavy burdens on others, but were unwilling to help move those burdens and everything they did, they did so as to be seen by others. "But woe to you, scribes, and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you do not go in yourselves, and when others are going in, you stop them." (Matthew 23:4-15)

In spite of this, the Pharisees sided more closely with Jesus than other groups at that time. They warned Jesus of Herod's intention to kill him (Luke 13:31), they were often present when Jesus was teaching and they respectfully called him "Teacher" (John 11:28).

All Jews at that time longed for the coming of God's kingdom, which represented the coming of peace, freedom and prosperity. So it was not unusual that they posed this question. Jesus' response to their question varies according to which version of the Bible you read. God's kingdom is: here with you (CEV), in the midst of you (RSV), among you (NRSV). within you (Good News).

Jesus answered that the day could not be known or predicted by mortals - that its coming would catch people unawares, just as the flood caught all but Noah by surprise, just as the flames that destroyed Sodom came suddenly while people were going about their daily business. The end days can come any time, therefore it is important to embrace the unknown of every day, trusting in God, keeping close to

Christ and letting our spirit be tempered by him, thereby creating a sort of kingdom among us. When we reach out to others, physically and spiritually, true humanity surfaces. We lift ourselves up as well. This is a force for beauty and healing. And this is our offering to God.

People can be reached and elevated to higher spiritual levels in many different ways. On a cathedral tour of England with the choir from Yorkminster Park Baptist Church, I walked into the overwhelmingly majestic and joyous "new" Coventry Cathedral - a phoenix that rose from the flames of pure evil, as evidenced in humankind's capabilities for destruction. The glorious sound of the organ was filling every corner of the building. It was thrilling! Shortly after that, I walked through an archway to the open-air, burnt-out silent ruins of the original 15th century Cathedral, which had been destroyed during an air raid in 1940 - an attack on the "soul" of the city, as many people saw it. Only the outer walls and tower and spire survived. An interesting juxtaposition of heaven and hell. After the bombing, the cathedral's stonemason, seeing that two of the charred medieval roof timbers had fallen across each other amid the rubble, tied them together and set them up in the ruined sanctuary. This cross became part of an altar and behind it, on the charred wall are engraved in gold the words, "Father Forgive."

We see violence around us every day, and we wonder about the coming of the kingdom of God, just as the Pharisees did. Meantime, we must prepare ourselves for that time, and strive to better our human condition, as we are able.

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