

# The Kingdom of God is Among Us

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Luke 17:20-21

**Sermon Series: The Kingdom of God**

*The kingdom of God isn't like football.*

It's time for that annual tradition in American culture—the Super Bowl. One hundred forty million people will watch at least a portion of tonight's game. That's more people than voted in the last presidential election.

It's the biggest at-home party day of the year. We will consume more food on Super Bowl Sunday than any other day of the year, excepting Thanksgiving. Would you believe 30 million pounds of chips and 12 million pounds of avocado?

Wagers on the Super Bowl will exceed 100 million dollars in Nevada alone. Internet gambling and private pools will likely push the number to several billion dollars.

Some of you watch the Super Bowl for the commercials. A 30-second commercial this year costs a cool 2.7 million dollars. Let me break that down for you: that's \$90,000 per second.

Football has become America's pastime. It's a game involving skill and precision. It's no small feat to coordinate the efforts of eleven players on each side of the ball.

Football is also a game that utilizes deception. Each team will run complicated defensive schemes to confuse opposing quarterbacks. They will attack with stunts and blitzes from every

position on the field. Defenses will disguise whether they are playing in man-to-man or zone coverage.

Deception also features prominently on offense. Each team will deploy multiple formations, send players in motion and utilize quick snap counts.

Most prognosticators favor New England to beat New York. The key to the game rests on the arm and mind of Patriots' quarterback, Tom Brady, who is a master at detecting defenses. Brady often uses a double cadence to see what the opposing defense is trying to disguise.

The kingdom of God isn't like football. It doesn't rely on deception and trickery. Nothing is disguised in the kingdom of God. Jesus said plainly, "The kingdom of God is among you."

The Pharisees ask Jesus in our Scripture lesson when the kingdom of God will be coming (17:20). They are convinced the coming kingdom of God will be so clear and unmistakable that no one could possibly miss it. The signs will be incontrovertible.

No doubt when the Pharisees ask this question, they have a particular political sign in mind. They expect the kingdom of God to be inaugurated by a political Messiah who will lead an insurrection against Rome.

It is not as if Jesus left them devoid of signs. The Pharisees'

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question follows right on the heels of Jesus' healing ten lepers (17:11-19). When it comes to giving signs, the healing of ten lepers is a "can't miss" sort of sign.

The signs which accompany Jesus' coming are unmistakable: the deaf hear, the lame walk, the dead are raised and good news is preached to the poor.

How ironic that the only one of the ten lepers who recognizes Jesus' sign is an outsider—a Samaritan. The religious insiders—Pharisees—are totally inept at reading signs.

Let me caution you about becoming overly critical of these Pharisees. You may be praying for someone but have already pre-determined how you think God should answer your prayer. We're not going to be in a position of receiving what God has for us if we've already decided what God's answer should be.

In answer to the question when will the kingdom of God come, Jesus says, "The kingdom of God is among you." If you follow the footnote at verse 21 to the bottom of the page, you will see an alternate translation of this verse: "The kingdom of God is within you." That's because the Greek word has two essential meanings—among or within. "The kingdom of God is among you" is the preferable translation, since nowhere else in the gospels does Jesus identify the kingdom of God as being within people. Jesus speaks about people entering the kingdom rather than the kingdom entering people.

The Greek construction of this sentence literally reads, "The kingdom of God among you is." The verb is placed emphatically at the end of the sentence to accentuate the present. When is the kingdom of God coming? It's here, folks! You're looking at it. The kingdom of God is among you. It's in your midst and within your grasp.

In short, Jesus' coming inaugurates the kingdom of God. He is the answer to the Pharisees' question. The coming of the kingdom is through Jesus.

Sometimes, what we are looking for is right in front of us. The great theologian Karl Barth once took a seat on a trolley next to a man who was visiting the city of Basel. As the trolley sped by Barth's house, the man said, "That's the house of the famous theologian Dr. Karl Barth. Do you know him?"

"Do I know him?" Barth responded. "I shave him every day." When the man went home, he told his friends that he had met Karl Barth's barber. What we are looking for is often right in front of us.

We don't have to look high and low for the kingdom. The kingdom of God isn't an elaborate puzzle to be assembled or a complex riddle to be solved. The kingdom of God is here. The kingdom is Jesus, here, today!

You may remember Dan Brown's best-selling book from a few years ago, *The Da Vinci Code*. Investigator Robert Langdon is called to explore the murder of an elderly museum curator, who was murdered near Da Vinci's Mona

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Lisa painting. Langdon discovers clues within the painting itself, which leads him on an extraordinary treasure hunt through Paris and London to find the Holy Grail. The kingdom of God isn't a secret code to be broken. The kingdom of God is here; the kingdom of God is now.

As long as the kingdom of God is something future, as someplace you go after you die, then we can pretty much put it off until we've got one foot in the grave. If the kingdom of God is essentially future, the only kingdoms that matter now are earthly in nature.

I saw a teenage girl wearing a tee shirt the other day with the words, "It's all about me! Deal with it!" Some of us live in the heavily fortified kingdom of the self!

Some of us live in the highly coveted kingdom of Wall Street. If truth be told, we depend far more on the kingdom of Wall Street than the kingdom of God.

Jesus extends to us an invitation to enter the kingdom of God. Last Sunday, we read Jesus' words, "Unless you change and become like children, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:5). Jesus said to would-be followers, "No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born from above" (John 3:3). People enter the kingdom of God the same way everybody enters this earthly kingdom. We are born into it. We are born into the kingdom of God by a spiritual birth. We enter the kingdom of

God as children—humbly receiving what God gives us.

If we have accepted this invitation by Jesus to enter the kingdom of God, we become kingdom people. The kingdom of God is not only a "bless me club." This kingdom also makes claims upon our lives. We cannot be members of this kingdom unless we are willing to acknowledge Jesus as king and sovereign over our lives. We are no longer lord over our own lives. Jesus is Lord!

During the season of Lent, we will be exploring what it means to live as kingdom people. We will consider how to speak the truth in love, practice forbearance and forgiveness, become willing to confront one another when wrongs have been committed, refrain from passing judgment on each other over inconsequential matters and lay down our lives for one another.

Jesus said, "The kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:14-15). Real near!

We are tempted to live according to worldly standards. We go behind each other's backs. We talk about each other rather than to each other. We hold grudges and nurse old hurts. We gossip and slander. We backbite and belittle each other. As James writes in his epistle, "Brothers and sisters, these things ought not to be so" (3:10).

The church has become too much like the world Christ came to save. What God wants to offer the world through the church is a viable alternative. One of the six "Great Ends of the Church," according to

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our Presbyterian Book of Order is “...the exhibition of the kingdom of God to the world.” Exhibition is an old-fashioned word meaning to display something. We display the kingdom of God in the way we treat each other. God intends His church to be an outpost of the kingdom of God here on earth.

I invite you to join me today in drawing a line in the sand. The following words express a Lenten resolve about the way to live the rest of our lives.

But let me forewarn you. What I am about to recite will not be accomplished by human striving alone. It will only be achieved by surrendering our lives to God and trusting in his mercy. We will undoubtedly fail to keep these promises, but we trust in God’s grace to help us and forgive us.

Today, I’m crossing the line. I’m going God’s way. I’m living the rest of my life for God’s kingdom and God’s glory.

From this time forward, I declare Jesus Christ as Sovereign Lord and acknowledge that I am not. I commit to live as Jesus’ disciple. I promise to follow his teachings, cultivate his character and live his life of love.

From now on, I endeavor to invite the Holy Spirit to fill me and use me.

I pledge myself to this body of believers. I will resist idle gossip, stupid controversies and hurtful slander. I will thwart back-stabbing and back-biting. I promise to build up and encourage. I will speak the truth in love and hold fast to what is good. I will love

extravagantly, forgive freely and live faithfully.

I will live this way until God calls me home.

