

## Lakewood Congregational Church

### Breathing In the Realm of God

July 26, 2020



*If we only had eyes to see and ears to hear and wits to understand, we would know that the Kingdom of God in the sense of holiness, goodness, beauty is as close as breathing and is crying out to be born both within ourselves and within the world; we would know that the Kingdom of God is what we, all of us, hunger for above all other things even when we don't know its name or realize that it's what we're starving to death for.*

Frederick Buechner

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

*31 Jesus put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; <sup>32</sup>it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'*

*33 He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'*

*44 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.'*

*45 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; <sup>46</sup>on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.'*

*47 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; <sup>48</sup>when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. <sup>49</sup>So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous <sup>50</sup>and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*

*51 'Have you understood all this?' They answered, 'Yes.'<sup>52</sup>And he said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.'*

♥ Every Sunday and often in our prayers we whisper, *"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."* In grammar, this is an appositive, where the noun or noun phrase further defines the previous noun or noun phrase. With addition or multiplication, it is the commutative property where  $4+2=6$  and  $2+4=6$ . *Thy kingdom come, thy will be done* or *Thy will be done, thy kingdom come*. Both reflect that God's will is present and God's kingdom or realm can be found on earth as it is in heaven. God's realm is not a specific physical destination. It is a sacred space available to all, right now, where we live, move, and have our being.

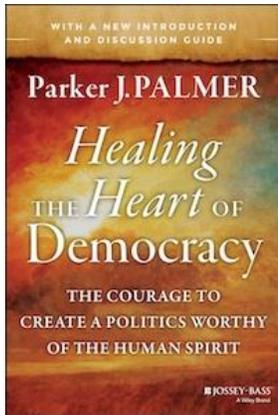
Whether we are speaking of the Kingdom of Heaven, the Realm of God, the Rule of God, or the Kingdom of God, we are discussing the same concept. In today's verses, we can feel and hear Jesus' urgency, his effort, in helping us understand this mysterious and sacred present and presence. The realm of God is like a mustard seed, a tiny seed that becomes a sheltering tree. The realm of God is like yeast mixed with other ingredients that rises and nourishes body and soul. The realm of God is like a hidden treasure that you earnestly seek and when you find it, you unearth life-changing joy. The realm of God is like a most valuable pearl, for which you are willing to sell all your possessions. Jesus concludes by saying that the realm of God is like a net, holding fish of all kinds, where the bad or evil ones are thrown out and the good are kept.

Perhaps Jesus includes so many examples because there are so many ways to experience the realm of God. We can plant seeds and watch them grow slowly, as we do when raising children or steadily working to heal creation. We, like yeast, can join with others to create a nourishing wholeness. We can pray, worship, and sit with God to find joyous treasure. We can deeply understand that the realm of God is worth more than our possessions. And we can choose to live, as often as humanly possible, in good soil like wheat or as good fish in a large sea. These paths to the realm of God are equally sacred.

Even as flawed disciples, we do have glimpses and even periods of time when we know the realm of God exists on earth. We melt when looking at a baby. We cry when others graduate or accomplish a goal. Our souls lift viewing a sunset. We experience a thin space where God seems within our arm's reach. We hold a loved one's hand and experience their soul returning to the Creator. Friends, do not whisper, *Thy kingdom come, thy will be done*. Boldly and gratefully believe that it is where you belong, where we belong. Jesus is inviting us to be at home, on earth as it is in heaven.

*The Kingdom of God is where our best dreams come from and our truest prayers. We glimpse it at those moments when we find ourselves being better than we are and wiser than we know. We catch sight of it when at some moment of crisis a strength seems to come to us that is greater than our own strength. The Kingdom of God is where we belong. It is home, and whether we realize it or not, I think we are all of us homesick for it.* Frederick Buechner

- What metaphor or simile would you use to describe the realm of God?
- When have you experienced God's realm in your life?
- Jesus asks all disciples, "Have you understood all this?" How do you respond?



Today is our fifth week exploring Parker J. Palmer's book, *Healing the Heart of Democracy*. If you missed the previous weeks, you may find the information on LCC's website under the blog tab, in the weekly reflections. Please purchase this book or borrow it from the library. This week, we are learning about the Fourth Habit of the Heart: A Sense of Voice and Agency.

*First Habit of the Heart: We're All in this Together*  
*Second Habit of the Heart: An Appreciation of Otherness*  
*Third Habit of the Heart: A Capacity to Hold Tension Creatively*  
*Fourth Habit of the Heart: A Sense of Voice and Agency*

## Videos

*The Fourth Habit of the Heart: A Sense of Voice and Agency* (1:00 min)

<http://www.couragerenewal.org/democracyguide/v16/>

- Where and when has your voice made a difference?
- Which current issue are you feeling nudged to be an active participant and not a spectator or audience member?
- Who in our culture has agency? Where do we need space created for other voices?

*Speaking our Truth: "I Believe"* with Parker Palmer and Carrie Newcomer (8:00 minutes)

<http://www.couragerenewal.org/democracyguide/v19/>

- Palmer and Newcomer speak of the habits of the heart as embodied practices that form the inward and outward signs of what we believe. What are your embodied practices about democracy, about faith, about family, and about community?
- Which beliefs do you say aloud?
- Which beliefs and practices are your gateways to the realm of God, to the holy in our midst?

*A Farmer's Heart* (3:25 minutes) <http://www.couragerenewal.org/democracyguide/v21/>

- Think of a variety of difficult decisions you have made. To whom did you report?
- When you are wrestling with a decision, who is in your circle of trust?
- When have you used agency, your power to act, to change or influence a decision?

♥ *Kintsugi* is a Japanese artform that is also practiced in other Asian countries. When a ceramic or stone object is broken, then it may be repaired with lacquer combined with powdered gold, silver or platinum, a metallic resinous glue. The damaged piece is not discarded. Instead, the reason for the break is acknowledged, carefully reattached, highlighted, and the break becomes a part of the piece's history. That reason may be as varied as an earthquake, a war, violence in the home, an accidental drop or a child playing too vigorously indoors. *Kintsugi* pieces and their stories are inherited from generation to generation.



Could this also be a description of how God interacts with us, earthen vessels of God's creation? God lovingly holds our broken pieces, names and honors our brokenness, binds us together regardless of how we are broken, and then creates a new whole with a redemptive story to be shared. Could this be a process to recognize the realm of God in our midst and in our world? Lovingly hold the pieces. Name them. Honor them. Bind. Create. Love. Share.

- How would your life story unfold if you honored your brokenness and made your healing a part of your story?
- Create an image of yourself as a broken and lovingly healed vessel. Share your story with someone else.
- Hold gently the broken pieces of a specific justice issue. How might you be the glowing resinous binder?



♥ Eric Whitacre began creating music and communal space for virtual choirs in 2011. At that time 185 singers from 12 countries volunteered to create a different musical experience. *Sing Gently* is Whitacre's sixth virtual choir and the composition was created for a world experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic. This choir features 17,572 singers from 129 countries. Note the influence of *kintsugi* in the visual component of this piece. Enjoy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InULYfJHKI0>

## Lyrics

*May we sing together, always.  
May our voice be soft.  
May our singing be music for others  
and may it keep others aloft.*

*Sing gently, always.  
Sing gently as one.*

*May we stand together, always.  
May our voice be strong.  
May we hear the singing and  
May we always sing along.*

*Sing gently, always.  
Sing gently as one.*

- What may you offer others that may keep them aloft?
- Listen to the entire video. Say a prayer of thanks for those who made this experience possible. Then, reflect on how these citizens of the world created agency by sharing their voice and gifts and adding their names to this musical petition.
- What are the similarities between this video and your understanding of the realm of God?

## References and Images

**Two-part quote:** Frederick Buechner, born 1926. [The Clown in the Belfry](#). San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992

**Mustard Tree:** <https://i1.wp.com/www.arizonakristi.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/1FBE2934C1E74006AFAE71801882EF50.jpg>

**Live, move, and have our being:** Acts 17:28, NRSV

**Parker J. Palmer:** [www.couragerenewal.org](http://www.couragerenewal.org)

Please accept my apologies for an inaccurate web address. Last week I had [www.courageandrenewal.org](http://www.courageandrenewal.org) as the website. The correct address is [www.couragerenewal.org](http://www.couragerenewal.org).

**Kintsugi:** [https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/proxy/kiFvfWOqEemEBvRUFcQQyNJoD-WOshUqoOY1\\_WIwKgrmKrUUleKahAaOv0S2OzQMrfBlrCQjPVUSDm3Yzodzo-e5R1ohUkO0GuMfkDT9RW4fgftzlo4zKt8y](https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/proxy/kiFvfWOqEemEBvRUFcQQyNJoD-WOshUqoOY1_WIwKgrmKrUUleKahAaOv0S2OzQMrfBlrCQjPVUSDm3Yzodzo-e5R1ohUkO0GuMfkDT9RW4fgftzlo4zKt8y)

**Sing Gently:** Eric Whitaker, 2020, <https://specials-images.forbesimg.com/imageserve/5f13280e6398dc00074d6207/960x0.jpg?cropX1=41&cropX2=3111&cropY1=144&cropY2=1871> Heartfelt thanks and abiding love to Catherine Coombs, alto and sister-by-choice, who shared this link and the influence of kintsugi on the video design. She is a forever blessing.