

# MISSIONAL INITIATIVES

## Monthly Newsletter

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### ARTICLE

The following is excerpted from a chapter Karen Wilk wrote in the book *Kingdom and Country: Following Jesus in the Land that You Love* edited by Angie Ward.<sup>[i]</sup>

#### **The Kingdom Is Here—Say What?**

So, the Kingdom is here. But what *on earth* (play on words intended) does “the Kingdom of God come near” really mean?

We don’t get a straight answer to this question in Scripture. Instead, Jesus describes the Kingdom with metaphors and parables. In so doing, Jesus invites us to discover the Kingdom as it is revealed in everyday life, in ordinary things, often seemingly insignificant things like shepherds and sheep, farmers and fields, bread and fish. Yet, these everyday stories and ordinary-life portrayals of the Kingdom of God confound and frustrate his expert listeners. We read that once, for instance,

Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, *the kingdom of God is among you.*” (Luke 17:20–21, NRSV, *emphasis added*)

And therein lies a significant clue to the nature of the Kingdom. Here and throughout the Gospels, we discover that the Kingdom of God, the reign of God breaking in and changing everything, is Jesus among us—with us! Jesus shows us the nature and intention of God’s Kingdom by embodying it in all that he says and does, revealing to us what a truly human life in relationship with God, our gracious, divine King, looks like.

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[i] Karen Wilk, “The Kingdom of God Is Here,” chapter 2 in *Kingdom and Country: Following Jesus in the Land That You Love* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2022), 25–27 & 32–35.

Jesus' presence, postures, and practices are definitely not what many expected from a king. We come to realize this most strikingly when we pay attention to how Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God. The King of God's Kingdom uses verbs that invite us into an entirely contrary posture to one of conquest, of building or advancing (emphasis added in each instance):

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to *give you the kingdom*" (Luke 12:32, NIV).

"Truly I tell you, whoever does not *receive the kingdom of God as a little child* will never enter it" (Luke 18:17, NRSV).

"Come, you that are blessed by my Father, *inherit the kingdom* prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34, NRSV).

"Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be *heirs of the kingdom* that he has promised to those who love him?" (James 2:5, NRSV).

"In this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly *provided for you*" (2 Peter 1:11, NRSV).

"It is your Father's good pleasure to *give you the kingdom*" (Luke 12:32, NRSV).

We are invited to receive and enter God's Kingdom. God's Kingdom come near is a gift! It is not something we can build, extend, control, or possess. The good news of the Kingdom is that God is with us, and that we can receive it, participate in it now, and inherit it in all its fullness when Jesus comes again....

## ...How?

By getting out of our pews and programs and joining God at work in our neighborhoods. Why? Because in order to get beyond *our* agency, we must open ourselves to *God's* agency. And as the first followers in Acts came to realize and respond to, that happens most often outside of our Jerusalems, our synagogues, our cathedrals, platforms, and paradigms. Furthermore, it requires us to be attentive to and discern the Spirit at work in *those* people and places where we least expect it, where we didn't plan for it—that we might discover that *they* are actually *our* people and places, and they are God's people and places! This is the good news story: *the Kingdom comes near* in Samaritan villages where we go with nothing (Luke 10:1–12). *The Kingdom comes near* on the blocks where beggars beg; on the beach at breakfast; on hillsides when we're all hungry; in boats on stormy seas or with empty nets; beside Samaritan wells; in tax collector's homes; among centurions, Canaanites, and Greeks; on Emmaus Roads when we are downtrodden; outside of the city; on our own; and at dinner with dirty feet, deniers, sleepy heads, liars, and betrayers.

I discover the Kingdom of God in the mustard seeds planted by my neighbors: My neighbors coming alongside a recent widow, bringing meals to a new mom, decorating a front yard with well wishes for the husband about to receive a life-saving kidney, providing childcare to the

young mom with cancer. I discover the Kingdom in our community “food forest”<sup>[ii]</sup> lovingly, graciously initiated by a neighborhood “Talking Gardens” group with hopes that many may benefit and that it will bear much fruit for all for decades to come. I recognize Jesus’ way as neighbors gather around campfires, and potlucks, sharing good food and wine, dreams and disappointments.

I point to God at work in book-club conversations about Indigenous people and our need for truth and reconciliation. I feel the welcome of God’s Kingdom when new neighbors are embraced, those with developmental disabilities are included, and prejudices are dissipated at the table. I discover and participate in God’s agency, first by listening, learning, reflecting, and discerning *That’s you God, isn’t it? Your Kingdom is here*, and then by joining in, sharing gifts, sharing our lives (1 Thessalonians 2:8), stewarding God’s grace in its various forms (1 Peter 4:10) with mutual love, appreciation, humility, and respect.

These stories are signs of God’s Kingdom come near in my neighborhood. There are many more, not only in my neighborhood but in yours. The sad thing is that unless we step out of our comfort zones, out of our church buildings, schedules, plans, and programs, out of our kingdoms and countries, we’ll miss them. We’ll miss the Kingdom of God right on our doorsteps! And we’ll miss God’s invitation to join in, point to, and celebrate: *God’s Kingdom come near!*

Maybe you didn’t know it, but my hope and prayer are that you do now: The Kingdom of God, in flesh and blood, has moved into your neighborhood, and you have been invited to receive it, to enter into it—with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength—and to participate in it by your attentive presence and love, just like Jesus. God’s Kingdom come near is also our prayer:

Your Kingdom come,  
your will be done, Lord Jesus,  
on earth as it is in heaven . . .  
for yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory. Amen.

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[ii] A food forest is a self-sustaining (as all forests through the centuries are), edible ecosystem with seven layers from underground to canopy—for example, from onions and leeks to strawberries, to asparagus and rhubarb to shrub berries, to apple, pear, and plum trees. We received a grant as a neighborhood, which helped us get started using permaculture and neighborhood “muscle.” We’re already enjoying not only its delicious produce but the community connections and environmental benefits (e.g., the bees and butterflies love our pollinators too!).

## For some next steps:

- Read the above book: [\*Kingdom and Country: Following Jesus in the Land that You Love\*](#) edited by Angie Ward.
- Ponder (and discuss) this short 'metaphor' video: [Tangible Kingdom](#).
- Ponder (and discuss) this deeply thoughtful, 17-minute video about God at work in the neighbourhood: [Transforming Through Love Part Two](#).
- Connect with [Karen](#) to learn more about the Kingdom of God come near in your neighbourhood and how you can discern and participate in it more fully.

Discover more about discerning, participating in and pointing to God's Kingdom Come Near by registering for some of Mission Initiatives Team's upcoming workshops or those being offered by The Commons Network, with whom we are partners through Forge Canada:

- [Neighbourhood Life Initiatives](#)
- [www.thecommonsnetwork.com/workshops](http://www.thecommonsnetwork.com/workshops)