

“Harmony”

Mark 1:14-20, John 8:12, 10:9, 11:25, 14:6 & Revelation 22:1-2

Pastor James York

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Prayer for Understanding Ever present Lord, we thank you for your word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Holy Spirit open our eyes to the signs of your presence, open our ears to your voice and open our minds to your wisdom. Amen.

Mark 1:14-20 NLT “Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where Jesus preached God’s Good News. “The time promised by God has come at last!” Jesus announced. “The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!” One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw Simon and his brother Andrew throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” And they left their nets at once and followed Jesus. A little farther up the shore Jesus saw Zebedee’s sons, James and John, in a boat repairing their nets. Jesus called them at once, and they also followed him, leaving their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men.”

Love, righteousness, peace and joy are landmarks that guide us on our journey to abundant life flowing from the Kingdom of God. **John 8:12, 10:9, 11:25, 14:6** “Jesus said, “I am the light, the way, the truth, the door, the resurrection and the life.

Jesus has come to show us the way. There is a mystery afoot in the cosmos and each person is called to cooperate with it. God’s call is universal. Jesus calls everyone to the Kingdom of God. Today, there is often negative baggage attached to the word kingdom. When using Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven, which are both the same concept in scripture, it does not mean a male dictator, not power over people, not rule, not enforcement. The Kingdom of God is God reigning, R E I G N, reigning. God liberating everyone from sin for communion, community, loving relationships with each other, loving relationships with God and loving relationships with the cosmos. The Kingdom of God, God’s reign, saves us from death for life, from shame for glory, from slavery for freedom, from brokenness for completeness, from darkness for light. The Kingdom of God, God’s reign, shines in the darkness and the darkness will never extinguish the light. The Kingdom of God is far more glorious than we can dream or imagine. Jesus told over a dozen parables specifically about the Kingdom of God. The entire Bible speaks about the Kingdom of God, so this message will merely touch upon a snippet of the Kingdom of God.

Everyone is called to participate in, and embody, the creative energy of God in restoring creation and expanding love, righteousness, peace, and joy. The Old Testament uses the Hebrew word, Ruah, for God’s creative energy. The Ruah hovered over the chaos and created the cosmos. The Ruah breathed life into clay creating humanity in the image of God. Ruah is wind, mist, air, breath, the life of the cosmos. In Star War terms, Ruah is the force. The New Testament uses the Greek word, pneuma. Pneuma united people at Pentecost and enabled them to communicate perfectly, to fully understand each other. Pneuma unites humanity with each other and God in baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Pneuma gave Peter courage to share the good news of the Kingdom of God. Pneuma is attitude, heart, prophecy, fire, community, depth, agency, blessing, gifts, angels, soul, essence, harmony, infuse and permeate.

Jesus announced: “The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!” Believe the good news. Have hope. Know that all will be well with your soul, that all will be glorious, that all people will be united in love forever. Know the promises of God are sure. God’s steadfast love endures forever. Each of us has an eternal essence. Every form of love and joy endures forever. All is designed to be in harmonious relationship. God has planted eternity in our heart even though we cannot perceive the coming glory.

The more one repents, the more of the good news of the Kingdom of God one can perceive, incarnate, and share. The more one repents, the more one shines with the image of God and the more of creation is

restored, rejuvenated, and resurrected. Repent means to turn. Repent is change and reestablishing priorities. Everyone is called to repent. Our journey will be like the disciples wandering with misunderstandings and failures and ultimately, full enjoyment of the Kingdom of God.

Four landmarks for the Kingdom of God are love, righteousness, peace, and joy. The opposites of love are fear and hate. Fear can paralyze one from loving. Fear coupled with not knowing the future, not knowing a person or group, not knowing an idea, concept, or agenda often leads to hate. We are commanded to repeat, to turn from fear and hate, to love. The media, politicians, and advertising often use fear to scare people to action. Turn from fear to love. Examine why you do what you do. Stop doing everything motivated by fear and change to everything being motivated by love. Examine your thoughts. Write down every fearful, hateful, or diminishing thought. Identify the distortions in those thoughts. Write a loving response. Write a loving thought that can replace the lack of love. Examine your speech. Stop any talk that promotes fear, dislike, or hate. Strive to have all your speech promote love. A landmark on your journey is the most excellent way of love.

Thankfully, God is abundant, infinite, every flowing with grace. All of us will repeatedly fail to love at all times, repeatedly fail in every form of repentance. God is always gracious. God always forgives. God always heals. This side of heaven, until the Kingdom of God is fully manifest, we are all in process. God is constantly loving us to establish a loving spirit within us. Constantly our sinful life is being replaced with a glorious perfect life. We continually fall short. God's grace always bridges the gap. We continually get lost. God's grace always gives us directions. We continually wander into dead ends. God's grace always creates a way. We continually, often unaware, choose darkness and death. God's grace always enables us to choose light and darkness.

A landmark for the Kingdom of God is righteousness. Being in right relationships with God, all people, and the cosmos is righteousness. Justice and equality are righteousness. We are commanded to repent, to turn from broken relationships to mending relationships, from being an enemy to a friend, from elevating oneself above another to being equals, from trying to control another to appreciating others, from using another to living in harmony with all, from taking from another to serving everyone. A landmark on your journey is righteousness.

A landmark for the Kingdom of God is peace. We are commanded to repent, to turn from worry to being hopeful, from worry to being non-anxious, from scarcity to wholeheartedness, from jealousy to gratitude, from frustration to satisfaction, from doubt to trust, from envy to generosity, from chaos to shalom. A landmark on your journey is peace.

A landmark for the Kingdom of God is joy. We are commanded to repent, to turn from sadness to joy, from grief to jubilation, from despair to elation, from misery to glee, from apathy to exhilaration, from woe to delight, from gloom to cheer.

Landmarks for the Kingdom of God are love, righteousness, peace, and joy. How do you repent? The Bible has examples, teachings, and guidance on repentance. The Holy Spirit, Ruah, Pneuma is working in your life to help you repent. The church, the family of faith, provides guidance. Christian fellowship is gatherings of people to share stories of repentance and encourage one another to change.

The Kingdom of God is near, already and not yet, our ultimate destination. In the novel *Windows of the Heavens*, pastor Harley Camden reads his congregation a line from the book of Revelation. **Revelation 22:1-2** **"The angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life ... and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."** Then Harley says to them, "Begin with the end in mind. This Scripture paints an image of our destination. It is the goal to which God is moving, from the first day of creation to the end of time. God wants there to be harmony between water and cities, and between plant life and human developments. The city, river and the tree of life all live in harmony. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." Harley pauses to let that message sink in. "Begin with the end in mind. The good news of the Kingdom of God is that God is working to bring harmony between heaven and earth, harmony between human society and the natural world, harmony between all people. This is a kingdom of love and righteousness, peace and joy. We move a little closer to this destination when we make decisions that are in line with the values of the Kingdom of God."

Fredrick Buechner writes: "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. 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."

N. T. Wright writes: "The empires of the world, as Napoleon said in a moment of candor, depend on force. They have come and gone; and the ones that now exist will follow in their turn. They make fear and death their weapons, and they themselves die when the fear they have generated turns into violent rebellion. Jesus, at his ascension, was given by the creator God an empire built on love. As we ourselves open our lives to the warmth of that love, we begin to lose our fear; and as we begin to lose our fear, we begin to become people through whom the power of that love can flow out into the world around that so badly needs it. And as the power of that love replaces the love of power, so in a measure, anticipating the last great day, God's kingdom comes, and God's will is done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Glimpses of the Kingdom of God fill me with awe that energizes my repentance. About a year ago, my family and I were in Fern Canyon in Prairie Creek Redwood State Park. At the entrance, we observed Elk grazing in the meadow. The narrow canyon was lush with vibrant green ferns growing on the cliffs on both sides. Looking further up, I saw majestic Redwood trees towering up, stretching into a brilliant sapphire sky. The stream was crystal clear dancing over a variety of rocks of an array of sizes and colors. The stream provided the baseline as the birds joined the chorus in pleasing song. The summer day was hot until we entered the cool refreshing oasis. The humidity caused droplets to dance on our skin. The air was pure, abundant with oxygen from all the plant life. There was an earthy scent, producing a clean, delightful taste. Our breath connected us with the ferns, the forest, the stream, the cosmos, God. Leslie and I sat on a fallen Redwood tree, I put my arm around her as we soaked in the beauty. Spencer and Abigail had joyful smiles as they marveled in the wonder of it all. I felt in sync with the cosmos, in love with my family, at perfect peace, in joyful awe, and in harmony with God as I delighted in the glorious beauty God created for us to enjoy. I sensed God smiling upon us.

"The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!" Amen