KINDOM OF GOD WITHIN US AMONG US

GENESIS 11:1-9 • LUKE 17:20-21 • 2 PETER 1:3

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CREATED FOR THE CHURCH BY
MONIQUE CRAIN SPELLS
REV. NATHAN KIBLER
REV. KAMILAH HALL-SHARP, PH.D
“The General Assembly of the Christian Church is joined in discipleship in all regions, churches, times, and places, and will gather in person in July of 2023. The theme is based on Luke 17:20-21, Genesis 11:1-9, and 2 Peter 1:3. The idea of the theme is envisioned as “Kindom of God: Within us, Among Us.” This theme is a call for Disciples to strengthen their relationship to God in both individual and communal ways through an expansive in-person and digital gathering of the church in Louisville, KY.

God’s limitless imagination holds so many possibilities for our church. We have multiple words, scriptures, languages, and ways to share and shape our common life. We have more than one story to tell, and more than one tool for innovation and distinctive witness in the future. God is with us. The kindom of God is among us. “Kindom” is not a spelling error or a replacement for the word kingdom. It’s a way of connecting the “kin” that God makes and expanding our imagination about Jesus.”[1]

Welcome to Session Three of Within Us, Among Us: Take Inventory! It is our hope you were stirred by Session One: Leaving Shinar and Session Two: We Don’t Have to Wait and that your spirits are now ripened for more time in the 1Peter. The General Assembly Planning Committee is pleased to provide three sessions of study for you and your congregation around the motivation for our 2023 General Assembly theme. Your three sessions are the following: Leaving Shinar – Genesis 11:1-9, We Don’t Have to Wait – Luke 17:20-21 and Take Inventory – 2 Peter 1:3. These three sessions are resources designed to illuminate and inspire our coming together in Louisville, Kentucky. The commentaries and questions are simply to get you started in conversation with God and one another.

[1] Rev. Yvonne Gilmore, Associate General Minister and Interim Administrative Secretary for the National Convocation.
Let us pray together...

Holy God,
We rejoice in calling you Family.
Because you are Family, we are made Kin with one another.
Your voice calls us from Shinar to new ways of planning and being.
The Wisdom of Spirit alerts us to your presence.
You anoint our eyes to see and ears to hear.
In your mystery, we are made watchful.
We open ourselves to journey out from our intentions toward yours.
Help us to see where You are!
Thank you for grace and an expectant patience in our discovery of You.
Be with us as we hone our vision. Let us sanctify our vision. Be our vision.
Amen.
2 Peter 1:3-8

3His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and excellence. 4 Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust and may become participants of the divine nature. 5 For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with excellence, and excellence with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, 7 and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love. 8 For if these things are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 1:3-8, NRSV
Reflection

The wonderful poet extraordinaire Maya Angelou said, “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.” If we are to look back over our lives, we can all see places where we did not do things well. Sometimes we whence at our actions or words. Our lack of knowledge often caused us to make these now-regretted actions. There are likely many things we did before we learned about God and God’s love for all of creation that we hopefully will not do or say now.

The author of the Peter 2 letter is writing to remind the community to remember what they were taught about God, and to remain hopeful and faithful while living as followers of Jesus. We, too, must be reminded of what we have been taught about God’s love, power, and what it means for our lives. The lack of knowledge of God and God’s love for all of creation is a leading source of the actions that traumatize and oppress God’s people. Since we have acquired this information, we have true knowledge about Jesus. However, what makes it true knowledge is not because it is what we believe, but by what it produces. We know about the love of Jesus, compelling him to be in relationships with marginalized people, serving, and working to improve the world.

Discussion Question

How does the knowledge of Jesus affect us?

What does our knowledge about God, God’s power, and God’s love encourage us to do?
Disciples have always been mindful that our faith calls us to something more than mere belief. God’s good news for the world is a call to hands on the plow and feet on the street. This passage is a joyful reminder that our God gives us everything we need to put our faith into practice. In this “Goodbye” letter, the author reminds their audience of this fact.

I take joy in hearing the stories of people who have felt like they did not have what it takes to share God’s love with others, only to discover within themselves that beautiful spark of Divine love. One person shared with me that while waiting to catch a plane; she noticed a woman sitting a few seats away looking rather upset. My friend felt compelled to go over to her to offer comfort. She sat down next to the upset woman and said, “This is strange, but I feel like I’m supposed to tell you that God loves you and God is with you.” The upset woman was grateful to hear these kind words. The two of them had a conversation before their plane boarded. For my friend, this experience was far outside of her comfort zone. An introvert to the core, she never would have thought she could approach a stranger to share a word from God. The gifts of God often take us out of our comfort areas to bring God’s good news to a world that is hurting.

God has already given us everything we need to live out our faith in the world.

For all who have journeyed with God through the seasons of life, especially winters, we have the benefit of a binding intimacy that informs our faith-walking. Some of us can give firm testimony the very survival of our sanity, hope, and grace rest solely on the weight of verse three in this passage. It is explicitly Divine power at work in us that will meet every need. This is where we blow through the stop sign.

In a society obsessed with individualism and a religion that has replaced the biblical understanding of communal salvation with one Sunday walk down the center aisle, we think we can accomplish too much in our own strength. It is Divine power that not only keeps us at God’s table, but also compels us to regard justly ALL who gather there, as we would regard Jesus and ourselves. We are human beings, some splattered with privilege and others splattered with the pain of inequity. The stickiness of these conditions make us vulnerable to other disruptive powers that are in direct conflict with Divine power.

It is unlikely, we will live into the call of this passage without laying down our agendas to “meet needs, escape corruption, exercise self-control, endure and show mutual affection.” In Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s prison poems, he offers, “Come away from your anxious hesitations into the storm of events, carried by God’s command and your faith alone. Then freedom will embrace your spirit with rejoicing.” Divine power is available for our living together and for one another. Let us Take Inventory.
Digging deeper, the conflict in the text is not exclusively staying or scattering, nor is the issue oneness. Each can be both life-giving and death-dealing. Unity is not always our polar star. Any call for unity that is not rooted in God’s covenantal blessings is a call to pseudo-unity—a mirage in the desert. The issue really seems to be whether our communities will be resolved to God’s purposes. Shinar is a pivotal place of resolution—a beginning of becoming.

Spend time listening to this song in stillness.
“You Say” by Lauren Daigle (link here)

Closing Prayer

Let us pray: Holy God, we acknowledge our call as contributors to the kingdom of God. Reveal to us how we may draw nearer to your promises by participating in your divine nature. Amen.

Plan time to share in study again with Session Three: Take Inventory. For more details about our upcoming General Assembly, please visit the website and sign-up to receive newsletter updates. We look forward to more ministry together.