

“Are We Invested in God’s Kingdom?”

Dr. Keith Wagner has shared this report, “Two cars were waiting at a stoplight. The light turned green, but the man didn’t notice it. A woman in the car behind him is watching traffic pass around them. The woman begins pounding on her steering wheel and yelling at the man to move. The man doesn’t move. The woman is going ballistic inside her car, ranting and raving at the man, pounding on her steering wheel and dash. The light turns yellow. The woman begins to blow the car horn, flips him off, and scream curses at the man. The man, hearing the commotion, looks up, sees the yellow light and accelerates through the intersection just as the light turns red. The woman is beside herself, screaming in frustration as she misses her chance to get through the intersection. As she is still in mid-rant she hears a tap on her window and looks up into the barrel of a gun held by a very serious looking policeman. The policeman tells her to shut off her car while keeping both hands in sight. She complies, speechless at what is happening. After she shuts off the engine, the policeman orders her to exit her car with her hands up. She gets out of the car and he orders her to turn and place her hands on her car. She turns, places her hands on the car roof and quickly is cuffed and hustled into the patrol car. She is too bewildered by the chain of events to ask any questions and is driven to the police station where she is fingerprinted, photographed, searched, booked and placed in a cell.

After a couple of hours, a policeman approaches the cell and opens the door for her. She is escorted back to the booking desk where the original officer is waiting with her personal effects. He hands her the bag containing her things, and says, ‘I’m really sorry for this mistake.’” **“But you see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, flipping that guy off, and cussing a blue streak at the car in front of you, and then I noticed the ‘Choose Life’ license plate holder, the ‘What Would Jesus Do’ and ‘Follow Me to Sunday School’ bumper stickers, and the chrome plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk, so naturally I assumed you had stolen the car.”** (Told by Dr. Keith Wagner)

You and I may disagree with some of the assumptions of the policeman in that report. However, when a person makes a point of very publicly drawing attention to his or her Christian beliefs and then very publicly acts or lives in ways, which seem to be in direct opposition to how most people would expect the owner of those bumper stickers to behave, **then such hypocrisy would encourage folks to question the relationship between the owner of the car and the person driving that car. For example, Jesus often pointed out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and their legalistic allies, while he warned his followers to not be like the Pharisees.**

Wagner’s story of the irate driver reminds me of Jesus’ exposing of the Pharisees’ hypocrisy and how their practices did not belong to God’s Kingdom. Today’s Scripture from the Book of Revelation dramatically and beautifully describes the Fulfilled Kingdom of God, which raises the issue of whether or not you and I are invested in God’s Kingdom.

Is our Faith Relationship with Jesus and God important for us? Is Jesus’ promise of the Fulfilled Kingdom of God valuable to us? **Does the way we use our resources in the living of our lives reveal our investment in God’s Kingdom is real or significant or, perhaps, little to none?** Would someone, who has had the opportunity to observe a significant portion of our lives, be surprised to learn we are or are not invested in our Divine Parent’s Kingdom? **If each of us was to answer the question of whether or not we, as individuals, are invested in God’s Kingdom, what would our answer be?**

Jesus Christ called his followers – those who belong to him – those who he promised will live in the Fulfilled Kingdom of God, to follow his example of living agape – self-giving and suffering love! Additionally, an important reason Jesus promised life in God’s Kingdom to his disciples was his message –

the Good News of our Divine Parent's Forgiveness and Agape – Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love for us, which was embodied in Jesus' Death and Resurrection. **If you and I trust – have faith in Jesus Christ and what God has done for us through our Savior, then we belong to our Lord and we seek to answer his call to follow his example – investing our lives – all of our resources with trust in Jesus, God, and the Kingdom!**

Today is All Saints Day! For some folks the term “saints” may refer to dead Christians, who were very holy during their lives. Considering the investment of those sterling examples of the faithful, it is undeniable they were heavily invested in God's Kingdom! Does that mean you and I are off the hook? No, because in the New Testament “saints” refers to all who belong to Jesus – who are committed to Jesus, God, and the Kingdom. Hopefully, by being reminded of our common role, as saints – followers of Jesus Christ, we recognize it is crucial for each of us and our relationships with God and one another for us to focus on and reaffirm the value of being invested in God's Kingdom. **How might you and I be invested in the Kingdom of God?**

Wallace H. Kirby provided insight into some critical ways we can be invested in God's Kingdom. Kirby wrote, “There are people crying all around us, people approaching the point of desperation. But many of their cries go unheard. The noise of the self-oriented machinery of our culture is drowning them out and they are dying. The world needs the merciful.” **“We all need someone who will identify with us. Someone who will hear our cry, listen, have empathy, and care. We all need to have an attitude of mercy and to be the recipients of such an attitude!”** Kirby continued, “As Shakespeare said: ‘The quality of mercy is not strained; It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest, It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes.’” (Wallace H. Kirby, *Beatitudes: Programs and Promises*, CSS Publishing)

As representatives of Jesus' and God's Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love – Agape, we are invested in God's Kingdom when we reach out with agape love to those who are hurting, in need of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. We do that, in part, through our Radical and Extravagant Hospitality toward everyone, especially those who are rejected by religious groups and society. **Our investment is a matter of time, energy, emotion, and dedication, and yes, financial support!**

In a fiction novel titled, The Book of Bebb, by Frederick Buechner, one of the main characters, Leo Bebb, says, in a rare moment of insight about all of this, “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a great feast. That's the way of it. The Kingdom of Heaven is a love feast where nobody's a stranger. Like right here. There's strangers everywhere else you can think of. There's strangers was born out of the same womb. There's strangers was raised together in the same town and worked side by side all their life through. There's strangers got married and been climbing in and out of the same fourposter together for thirty-five or forty years and they're strangers still. And Jesus, it's like most of the time he is a stranger too. Even when he's near as the end of your nose, people make like he's nowhere around. They won't talk to him. They won't listen to him. They keep their eye on the ground.” **“But here in this place there's no strangers, and Jesus, he isn't a stranger either. The Kingdom of Heaven's like this. ... Dear hearts, we got to love one another and Jesus or die guessing.”**

On Consecration and Thanksgiving Sunday, November 15th, each of us have the opportunity to renew our Faith – Promise Commitment – to confirm our decision to invest in God's Kingdom with our financial support in 2016 and with all of our lives. **Will you and I make the investment? Will we “love one another and Jesus”?** Amen.