
Near Enough to Touch: Living into the Kingdom of God Here and Now

A sermon by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell
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“The kingdom of God has come near to you.”

When Jesus says, “The kingdom of God has come near” (Luke 10:9) or “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21, often translated “among you”), he is not describing a place or a distant future event. He’s describing a present and transformative reality—God’s active presence breaking into the world, and into our lives, here and now.

When the kingdom “comes near,” it means God’s presence, power, and purpose are available, accessible, and unfolding—in our lives, in our communities, in this moment.

To live in the kingdom is to live according to the values and vision of God: love, mercy, justice, humility, forgiveness, and peace. The kingdom draws near when we live in alignment with these—not as abstract ideals, but as concrete acts of love and relationship. The kingdom isn’t something we build by effort alone. It’s something we enter by grace and trust.

As Rowan Williams might say: You’re already standing on holy ground. You just need to take off your shoes.

You might think we’d all jump at the chance. But we don’t. Why is that? What gets in the way?

In Luke’s story of Jesus calling the seventy, we get a glimpse of the answer.

Jesus tells his disciples it’s time for him to go to Jerusalem, where he will be killed.

They respond in a way that shows they still don’t fully grasp what it means to live in the kingdom of God.

They argue about who among them is the greatest.

They hear that someone in another town is healing in Jesus’ name—but because he’s not one of them, they want to call down fire and lightning.

Jesus sends messengers ahead to a village in Samaria where he hopes to stay—but they’re rejected.

And as Jesus walks the road to Jerusalem, he invites others to follow him. They respond with the ancient equivalent of, “I’d love to—but I’ve got something really important to do first.”

Despite how beautiful the kingdom sounds, it’s clear not everyone is ready to say yes.

It’s in this context that Jesus appoints the seventy and sends them to the towns he plans to visit.

He gives them very specific instructions:

- Carry no purse, no extra sandals.
- Don’t greet anyone along the road.

- Stay in the first house that welcomes you.
- Eat whatever they give you.
- Don't move from house to house.
- Heal the sick.
- And if you're rejected, wipe the dust off your feet—and as you leave, say: "The kingdom of God has come near."

At first glance, these instructions sound severe. And that final line can feel like a threat: "You had your chance and missed it." But look again—especially in light of how we usually live—and you may see that these are not harsh commands, but spiritual practices.

When we're anxious or afraid—I'll speak for myself—my instinct is to try to control things.

I want to own the situation. I want things to go the way I planned, to turn out how I expected.

That instinct can be useful. If you're learning how to use a tool, or provide food and shelter, or protect someone you love—it can be life-giving. But in relationships, that same instinct can do real harm.

Why? Because control can turn people into problems. It makes us treat others as objects—people we do things to or for—but not people we are with.

Jesus wants the seventy to loosen their grip, to travel lightly, so they can be truly present to the people they meet.

The kingdom of God is a way of being that—as the saying goes—is more easily caught than taught. You can't argue someone into it. You can't just stand on a corner with a beard and a sign. You have to live it. You have to let others see it in your life. That's when they start to wonder what you've found—and whether they want to find it too.

So think again about the instructions:

- Travel light. No purse, no extra sandals. I packed more than that just to come to Maine! But traveling light reminds us that we are not in control. We are not self-sufficient. We need others. We need community.
- Don't greet people along the road. Not because friendliness is wrong—but because focus is necessary. Don't get distracted. Don't fill every silence with noise. Don't let every new voice pull you away from your call.
- Stay with the first person who welcomes you. That might not seem hard—but it is. There's a reason the Ten Commandments warn against envy. We often think, "That house is nicer. That opportunity looks better." But Jesus says: Be grateful for the people you're with. They are enough.
- Eat whatever they serve. Again, this is about learning to receive. It may not be what you wanted—but it's enough.
- And if you're rejected? Wipe the dust off your feet. Not because you're done with them. Not because you're angry. But because you don't have to carry that rejection with you. Don't let it become resentment. It's not about you.

Then say simply: "The kingdom of God has come near."

Not as a condemnation. But as a reminder.

The invitation is here, in this relationship, in this moment. And it will come again.

These aren't just rules for evangelism. They are spiritual practices that reshape us—the ones who are sent. They expand our capacity to experience God's presence and to become instruments of grace in the world.

Jesus isn't just training missionaries. He's forming pilgrims.

He wants the seventy to experience God in a new way—to glimpse what it's like to live in the kingdom of God not only for others' sake, but for their own.

He wants them to be transformed.

He wants others to look at them and see the image and likeness of God in their eyes.

Let me give you a more contemporary image.

I love dinner scenes in movies. The table is such a powerful stage—where characters face one another, often literally and metaphorically. Where masks drop, truths emerge, and relationships are tested and sometimes healed.

It's not surprising, really, that the image of a heavenly banquet is one of Scripture's richest metaphors for the kingdom of God.

One of my favorite dinner scenes is from the 1999 romantic comedy *Notting Hill*.

Hugh Grant plays a humble bookstore owner. Julia Roberts plays a world-famous actress. Somehow, they end up in a relationship. And at one point, he invites her to dinner with his quirky group of friends.

She's the guest of honor—the one with all the status and glamour. But through food, laughter, and conversation, these individuals gradually become a group.

Then the host says, "There's only one brownie left. I think it should go to the person with the saddest life story."

So they go around the table, each person playfully claiming it: "I'm not good-looking... I never make money... no one really likes me..."

In response, the group gently and humorously reminds each person of their worth.

Finally, Julia Roberts' character chooses to play. She chooses to be vulnerable. She chooses to be seen.

She says she's full of anxiety. She's afraid she'll lose what she loves. She's not sure she's a good actor. She knows one day the fame will fade, and she doesn't know what will be left.

It's a beautiful, honest moment.

Just as she opens up further, Hugh Grant cuts in and says gently, "Nah, not good enough. You don't get the brownie."

It's not rejection. It's care.

It's his way of saying: You've shared enough. We see you. We love you. You're one of us now.

Why?

Because they had the courage to reveal themselves—just a little.

Because they saw and were seen.

Because they stayed in the moment with each other.

And in doing so, they remembered that they loved—and were loved.

And that, I believe, is the moment the kingdom of God comes near.

It's the moment when you allow yourself to be truly seen—and realize you are truly loved.

Amen.