

Several years ago, my oldest daughter gave me a thing she had crocheted. It was about 18 inches long and hollow in the center like a sock. It's a fun color, but I was clueless as to what it was. She looked sort of embarrassed and I wasn't sure what to say. "It's really pretty, is it a coin holder?" I asked. She turned red and said "No." And then she started talking fast explaining how it was supposed to be a scarf, but she ran out of yarn and Hobby Lobby didn't have the same kind of yarn. She told me how it took a long time and that she had finally given up on it and figured I would know what to do with it. I said I knew exactly what to do with it and I got up and went to my bedroom with it. To this day, it covers the bed knob on my side of the bed... a sort of knob warmer, I guess. It's one of my cherished gifts. (pause) /

Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever received a gift and had no idea what it was or what you were supposed to do with it? /

I wonder if that's what happens to us when we hear Jesus say, "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." We're not (1)

quite sure what it is. We often don't know what to make of the kingdom or what to do with it. /

Is Jesus talking about royalty, wealth, palaces, and power? For many of us those are the images that come up when we think about a kingdom. That's what a kingdom often looks like in movies and history books. /

Is he talking about heaven? Is the kingdom a reward in the next life for being good, having faith, and believing in this life? If so, then is this life nothing more than an installment payment to secure a future place in heaven? /

Is the kingdom security, safety, and guaranteed outcomes? After all, Jesus prefaces the giving of the kingdom by saying, "Do not be afraid." I suppose it would be nice if that's what the kingdom was, but security, safety, and guaranteed outcomes have not always been my experience of life. What about you? (pause) /

Most of us pray weekly, if not daily, for the kingdom to come on earth, but what are we praying for? What comes to mind when you think of or pray for the kingdom? / (2)

My guess is that most of us think of the kingdom as something to be possessed: a reward from God, a perfect life in which we have everything we want and everything goes our way, an ideal world. But what if it's not? What if the kingdom is not something to be possessed or had? What if it's a different way of being? And here's why I ask that. Right after Jesus says, "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," he tells us to sell our possessions and give alms, and to make purses that do not wear out. He talks about thieves that do not come near and moths that do not destroy. /

I don't think those are prescriptions or prerequisites for getting the kingdom. Rather, they are descriptions of what the kingdom life is like. So let me ask you this. What's the best way to keep a purse from wearing out? Don't put anything in it. What's the best way to keep a thief away? Don't have anything worth stealing. What's the best way to keep moths from destroying? Don't have anything that can be destroyed. / (3)

So, what if the kingdom is a non-possessive life? A life in which we sell our possessions and give alms, a life in which our purses are empty, a life in which there is nothing to steal or destroy. (long pause) /

As always, I think it's best to process carefully what the text is saying, rather than simply looking at it literally. Jesus is using metaphor, calling us into a new way of seeing and living. I am not suggesting we all need to be poor, go without, or be lacking. And I don't think Jesus is saying we shouldn't own or have anything. In and of itself there is nothing virtuous about poverty, lack, or insufficiency. The world does not need more poor people. What the world needs is people who are **NOT** possessed by their possessions, people who live a non-possessive life. In essence, kingdom people. /

Michael Marsh tells the story of a friend of his who spent a few days at a monastery. The abbot gave him an old book from the abbot's own library. It was rare and valuable not only in terms of money but also in wisdom and insight. Michael's friend was amazed the abbot would so freely give him such a book. "The abbot gave me his personal book. Can you believe he did that?" he asked. He was describing a (4)

non-possessive life. He was going on and on about the abbot giving him the book until Michael interrupted and asked, “May I have that book?” “No, you can’t have it,” he said. “It’s mine. He gave it to me!” (pause) /

I would likely of answered the same way, “No, you can’t have it. It’s mine.” I too live a possessive life. Most of us do. /

Jesus is offering another vision of life, a kingdom vision. He is calling into question a possessive way of life. The kingdom is not a different place, a reward, or a thing to be had. It is a different way of being, living, and relating. The kingdom is not a “where” or a “what” but a “how” and a “now.” /

When I live a possessive life, I am more focused on me than we, more passionate about my rights than my responsibilities, and more concerned about being right than doing what’s right. I worry about the thief that steals and the moth that destroys. I fear not only not having enough but that I am not enough. I am always striving for more: more money, more stuff, more status, more success, more control, even more of God. Does any of that sound familiar? Does some of that resonate with your life? / (5)

We see it every day in the news. It's what lies behind our conflicts and divisions. And if we are honest, we can see it in our lives too. We are possessive people, concerned about keeping what we have and getting what we don't have. We not only possess but are possessed by what we possess whether they are things, beliefs, opinions, status, or power. /

Have you ever felt like you were possessed by your work, your success, your house, or the stuff you own? Do you ever feel like you spend more time and energy creating or maintaining your life than living it? Have you ever felt possessed by your position, another's approval, the need to be right, the need to win or be in control? And if so, what did it cost you? What did you lose? Is that how you really want to live, who you want to be? Is that how you want your children or grandchildren to live? /

Have you ever been concerned about who was moving into your neighborhood? Have you ever become angry and defensive when someone questioned or challenged your religious or political beliefs? Have you ever felt the need to change someone or get them to do it (6)

your way? Have you ever needed to have the final word or to be right?
And if so, what were you trying to possess? Or maybe the better
question is what was possessing you? (pause) /

I believe we're at our best when we live non-possessive lives. We
become more welcoming and hospitable. We forgive more freely.
We're more generous with our time, money, and resources. We love
more extravagantly. We see more clearly our deep interconnection with
and need of others. A non-possessive life deepens our conversations and
intimacy. It makes us better parents, spouses, and friends. We handle
conflict and differences in better and more productive ways. We open
our hearts and minds to other people and new possibilities. We're more
creative and less judgmental of ourselves and others. Life is fuller, and
we are freer to live. That's how I want to live, most of us probably do.
We want to live in the kingdom of life. (pause) /

///// I also believe fear is the greatest impediment to a non-
possessive life. Most of us live in fear, consciously or unconsciously, of
losing what we have and not getting what we don't have. Maybe we
should be more afraid of what we already have, of being owned by (7)

our possessions and desires. Maybe that's what Jesus is talking about when he says, "Do not be afraid." Do not be afraid of a non-possessive life. /

What is possessing you today? What owns your life? In what ways are you being possessive of things, ideas or opinions, opportunities and resources, other people, yourself, God? What would a non-possessive life look like for you today? (Long pause) /

"It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Amen.