

Thy Kingdom Come...

Isaiah 61:1-11

Right there at the top of your handout are two words: God is. Go ahead and write or type in a few words. God is... what? Take the next minute and write things you know to be true of God.

God is...

Shout out some answers. God is... loving, merciful, faithful, good, all-powerful, all-knowing, gracious, holy, righteous, just.

Here is one verse that shows us the character of God:

“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.” Psalms 89:14

These are **two concepts that are central to God’s character**, each presented with two words. **Righteousness and justice** on one side; **love and faithfulness** on the other. God is both loving and just, both righteous and faithful. These realities are inseparable for God is One and He holds all of His qualities perfectly, eternally and unchangeably.

I’ll give away the punchline of the sermon right away. **The cross is where God’s love and justice meet**. Listen to Romans 3:

*“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are **justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus... so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.**” Romans 3:23-24,26*

The redemption of Christ - his work of salvation - is the ultimate act of grace - a free gift of love; and it is the ultimate act of justice. God poured out the punishment for all sin - the full strength of His divine wrath in judgment - all of it, on Jesus on the cross. Justice was served while Jesus hung there, agonizing in the darkness. **God satisfied justice by sacrificing His only Son**. And because justice was served, mercy could win.

Since the price was paid, grace could be offered. Salvation is a free gift of God’s grace, but it was anything but cheap. It cost the life of the eternally divine, perfectly glorious, absolutely righteous Son of God. God is both just and the justifier of the one who believes in Jesus.

Love and justice - meet right there on the cross.

That is the centerpiece of history and the focal point of God’s self-revelation. **Do you want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus** - and specifically, look at the cross. The suffering and death of Jesus prove once and for all that **God is infinitely loving AND that He is perfectly just**.

To say God is only loving would neglect the reality of His justice and holiness. But to say God is only just would leave out the fullness of His love. God is infinitely perfect and two of His many perfections involve His justice and love - both of which are most fully seen in Christ on the cross.

So.... Since God is both loving and just - **how then should we live? What does that mean for us as a church?** What does it look like for us to be a church that models and teaches biblical compassion and divine justice? This is a big topic, and not one we can resolve in one sermon. But we can touch on some of the issues and at least establish the fact that these are important things to think about, study and work on.

As we continue our Reach the World series, today we will see ***three Kingdom callings:***

Thy Kingdom Come...

1. ***Proclamation*** - we Announce the King's Arrival
2. ***Demonstration*** - we Minister the King's Love
3. ***Restoration*** - we Work for the King's Justice

Sometimes scholars and preachers refer to the Kingdom of God and make it into some cloudy, cerebral concept. But it's actually very simple. ***When you have the Kingdom - you have the King.*** What does it mean to "seek first the kingdom"? And to pray "Thy kingdom come"? I believe it involves these three callings.

First and foremost, as servants of the King of Kings, ***we have been commissioned to proclaim the good news that the King Himself has come***, that He died and rose again, and that He is coming back soon to judge the living and the dead. The kingdom "comes" or advances a little more every time King Jesus is announced and His name is held in honor.

As we go about our mission to make disciples of all nations, ***we demonstrate for a watching world what our King's love looks like***. This is mainly done through how we love and serve one another in the church - living as a unified body in which each part defers to and submits to the other parts. It is when we truly live out our unity in Christ that the watching world comes to believe that everything we say about Jesus is actually true.

And as we focus on our disciple-making mission as a church, the Lord sends us out into a hurting and broken world ***to minister His love and work for His justice***. We don't just pray "your will be done," we work to increasingly see God's will done on earth as it is in heaven.

Our first kingdom calling is proclamation.

1. ***Proclamation*** - we Announce the King's Arrival.

"The Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor... to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God." 61:1-2

This was Jesus' mission statement - which he read in Luke 4 in his first sermon and then announced that he had come to fulfill it. He came, primarily, on a mission of proclamation. When you

study the life of Jesus you see that he healed lots of people, he drove out demons and he did some other cool things like walking on water and feeding large crowds. But **the main thing Jesus did was teach.** He came to announce a message of good news centered on HIMSELF.

What he preached was **“the kingdom of God is at hand,”** which was his way of saying, **“your king has arrived!”** Jesus’ arrival marked the year of God’s favor - the day of salvation. The Jews had waited and prayed and fussed and whined for centuries, begging God for DELIVERANCE. Here was the answer to all of those prayers - beyond any of their wildest dreams (which is why most of them didn’t think he was legit).

We’ve already seen in this series how ***proclaiming the Gospel is central to our mission.*** If we are to make disciples of all nations we must be faithful and bold in announcing the good news that our King has come and has opened the door of salvation. Forgiveness and freedom are now available in Christ! We all struggle with sin - that is the fundamental human problem. But Jesus came to break the power of sin by paying the price for it and enduring the just wrath our sin deserves. Our King left His throne in heaven, lived among us for 33 years, died on the cross as a ransom for sinners and rose again victorious over sin and death forever. This proves that:

1. **Proclamation** - we Announce the King’s Arrival.

“The Lord has anointed me **to bring good news to the poor... to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor** and the day of vengeance of our God.” 61:1-2

- He is Infinitely **Merciful** and Perfectly **Just**

Jesus announced the year of the Lord’s favor. In his sermon in Luke 4 he stopped reading at that point. It was an old Rabbi trick to see if your followers have been paying attention. Did they catch what he said? Did they realize what he left out? We have the full quote in front of us - “and the day of vengeance of our God.”

When Jesus came 2,000 years ago he came on a mission of mercy. When Jesus comes again, he will be on a mission of justice. So this raises the question:

“The Lord has anointed me **to bring good news to the poor... to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor** and the day of vengeance of our God.” 61:1-2

- He is Infinitely **Merciful** and Perfectly **Just**
- **Which do you want from Him, Traitor?**

Right now God’s mercy is still available for all who come to Jesus in faith. When Jesus comes back that door will slam shut and only justice will be forthcoming. The King has come. The King gave his life in the ultimate act of mercy and grace. But when the King comes back - every one of us will answer to Him. Do you want mercy now or will you be forced to take justice then?

Because all of us are traitors to the King. We have not given Him the perfect obedience and reverent service He deserves as the Creator and Lord of the Universe. We have betrayed Him and given our hearts and service to other gods. We have betrayed His Kingdom and tried to overthrow His

rightful rule in our lives. Every one of us is guilty of treason against the crown, deserving of His just and swift condemnation.

Here are some simple definitions:

- **Justice** is getting what you deserve
- **Mercy** is *not* getting what you deserve

Remember, God is infinitely merciful but also perfectly just. Anyone on earth can receive God's wonderful mercy now by putting their faith in Jesus. But all who refuse or fail to take that step will, by default, receive God's justice. They will get what they deserve.

Oh, brother, sister, friend - ***be very careful about asking God for justice***. None of us want that from God. We do not want what we deserve - that would not end well for us. What we want - what we NEED - is mercy. And God's mercy opens the door to His grace, which goes even further to give us the blessing we could never deserve. Mercy withholds judgment, grace pours out blessing.

That is what we proclaim when we proclaim Christ, the King. Our second kingdom calling is demonstration.

2. Demonstration - We Minister the King's Love

"The Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound." Isaiah 61:1-2

- He is Compassionate to those who are Hurting

Jesus was constantly reaching out to people in love. He touched lepers that no one else would go near. He welcomed tax collectors who were hated and disreputable women who were considered unclean. He even talked with Samaritan half-bloods and full-on Gentile barbarians.

Jesus healed many who came to him. He released people from demonic oppression. All of this because he was moved by compassion and mercy.

"For God so LOVED the world that he gave his only Son." If you ever question the reality of God's love, just remember those first simple truths: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." The final proof of God's love is that He gave up his Son. Jesus took his love to the ultimate end - by dying a criminal's death for you and for me.

SO - if we are to honor God's heart of love and follow Jesus' example of compassionate ministry, we must be ministers of mercy, helping people see and feel the reality of God's love for them. But the Bible is clear that **there is an important PRIORITY to our love and concern.**



The center of the bullseye is to **love God** with all that we are - heart, soul, mind and strength. The natural result of a love for God is a **love for one another**. You can't claim to love God and then refuse to love His people. You can't claim to follow Jesus and then have nothing to do with the church, which he calls both his BODY and his BRIDE. Either way, the church is inseparable from Jesus. If you love Jesus, you must love His church.

So our priority and our focus is to love and serve ONE ANOTHER in the church. This is the main reason we have small groups at Oakwood - so we can have close enough relationship with each other to really love and care for one another.

We are also, of course, called to **love our neighbors** as we love ourselves - which is a very high calling, since we are all very good at loving ourselves. (Even if you think you hate yourself you are still very good at focusing on yourself - so your problem is not that you love yourself too little but actually that you focus on yourself too much.) Galatians 6:10 is very helpful and clear:

“So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Galatians 6:10 [include bullseye next to verse]

Our love for one another has a spillover effect. If we do well at loving each other in the church, some of that love will slosh over onto the other people God has placed around us. God is merciful and compassionate and the more we know Him and become like Him, His love should flow through us - first to one another and then to a hurting world.

We all apply the principle of priority - life requires it. Your first minutes, dollars and efforts go to your closest family members. That is good and appropriate. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for giving large gifts publicly but neglecting to care for their own aging parents. We are most responsible for the people closest to us, particularly our family members.

This principle extends, then, into the church family. If you are a regular here at Oakwood, then you have a greater responsibility to love, care for and serve the church family here than you do to strangers on the street. Similarly, you have a greater responsibility to a close neighbor or co-worker you see a lot than you do for a random clerk at Publix.

Again, Galatians 6:10 is helpful because it says, “as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone.” The Lord will lead you to do specific acts of kindness and mercy in the name of Jesus. Demonstrate His love to lost and hurting people, as you have opportunity. Pray for opportunities and the Lord will bring them along!

But our demonstration must always be in service to our proclamation. ***Think of acts of kindness as breadcrumbs leading to a feast.***

In Matthew 15 we see a Canaanite woman who came to Jesus and his disciples begging them to cast a demon out of her daughter. Jesus didn't answer her at first but she kept coming after his team, so the disciples finally begged Jesus to send her away. But Jesus spoke to her saying:

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Matthew 15:24-26

*She said, "Yes, Lord, yet **even the dogs eat the crumbs** that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly." Matthew 15:27-28*

This passage has helpful implications for us with outreach. Jesus was sent to the lost sheep of Israel. His mission focused on the Jewish nation. In the same way, our mission is focused on gathering in believers and training all who come in to love and serve and care for one another. That is our bullseye - the center of our mission and calling - proclaim the gospel, make disciples and train them to love one another.

We gather together as a church family and feast on all that God has given us in Christ. But as we do that, the Lord will bring people across our path, like this Canaanite woman who came to Jesus. Some who appear far from God will suddenly develop an interest in spiritual things and start asking questions about your faith, your church, your God. And we throw them breadcrumbs of kindness, demonstrating God's infinite love for them - praying that our kindness will help them realize God's wonderful kindness and draw them to the banquet.

2. Demonstration - We Minister the King's Love

*"The Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me **to bind up the brokenhearted**, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound." Isaiah 61:1-2*

- He is Compassionate to those who are Hurting
- **Our Breadcrumbs should lead to the Feast**

Acts of kindness and compassion can be a wonderful adornment to the gospel. Our proclamation of God's grace should be supported by a demonstration of God's great love. The more we know God as a God of infinite love, mercy and compassion the more His character should grow in us and overflow through us to others. **Breadcrumbs of love and mercy should regularly fall from our tables.**

Hurting people are all around us, if we will just open our eyes. God is merciful and compassionate toward all people. He loved the world so much He sent His only Son to die for us all. Jesus came to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted and to announce the year of the Lord's favor.

So here is the summary of our three kingdom callings:

Thy Kingdom Come...

1. **Proclamation** - we Announce the King's Arrival
2. **Demonstration** - we Minister the King's Love
3. **Restoration** - we Work for the King's Justice

Our priority as a church is to focus on proclamation and demonstration. Our commission is clear - to make disciples of all nations by preaching the Good news, calling for commitment and teaching believers to obey all that Jesus has commanded us. So we unapologetically focus - as a church - on preaching Christ and Him crucified and loving one another well in the church. After all, the best evidence for the truth of Christianity is a loving and unified church body. When people see believers loving and serving one another joyfully - it will make them wonder what is up with us.

And as we love one another well, some of that love will spill over to hurting people God has placed around us - they will taste the breadcrumbs of God's mercy. And as people feel some of that kindness and compassion, we pray that it will lead them to the feast of grace in Jesus.

So the bullseye **for the church** is Gospel-centered disciple-making: proclaiming the good news, training disciples of Jesus and building up the local church as a family that loves and serves each other well.



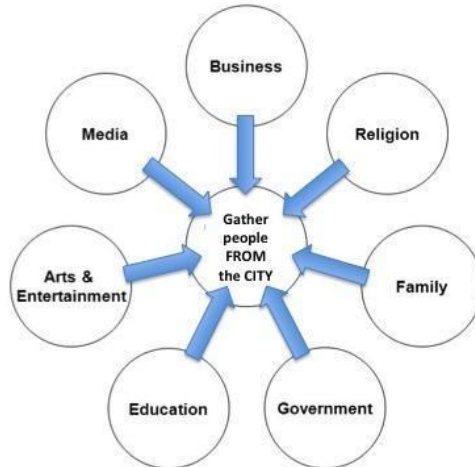
There is an element of restoration that individual local churches might get involved in - working for the King's Justice in a certain area. But the church is not on a mission to change social structures. Remember, that's what people wanted Jesus to do - and he would not do it. He did not overthrow Rome and become Emperor in place of Caesar.

I know some of us are interested in politics. Some are passionate about certain causes - and rightfully so. We fight for the life of the unborn. All of us believe in ending the modern slave trade in which boys and girls are bought and sold for pleasure right here in Tampa Bay. We are concerned for the poor and want to help people make a better life for themselves. But as good as those causes are - ***it is not the mission of our church or THE church to fix them.*** Do you see that?

Some individual believers are called to give your lives to a cause like that. Praise the Lord for that! Go after it! God may have given you a passion for the unborn or a love for the orphan or a legal mind that can take on the political structures of the day and move the dial more toward justice. But the church must work to focus our energies on making disciples - and if we are as effective as possible at raising up passionate, fully devoted followers of Jesus, some of THEM will go out and bring more of the Kingdom to bear in this world.

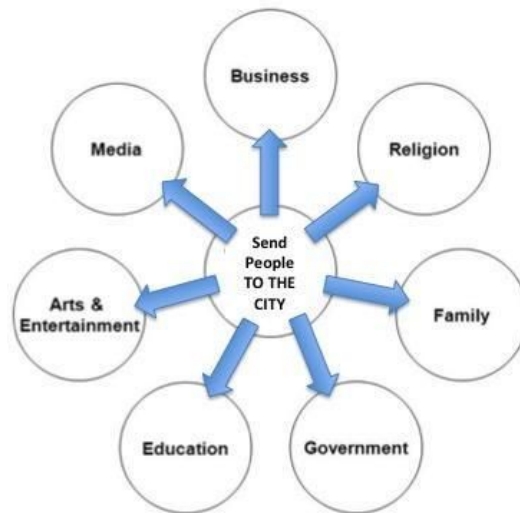
Our mission as a church is to **build up the church** - to gather in believers FROM the city and train them to follow Jesus.

Build
the
Church



But part of how we make disciples is training believers to demonstrate God's love and work for His justice - sending them out, wherever God has placed you - to reach the world.

Reach
the City



We ARE the light of the world. And we are the salt of the earth. As we pray "Your kingdom come," we should work to please God more and more with the world we live in.

God's Design will not be fully restored in this world; but we can still work toward His Desires

We should pray and work toward the Kingdom of Christ coming more fully into the business sector of Tampa Bay. We should pray that God's will would be done more fully in the media (one reason we are supporting a Christian film like the Favorite). We should pray God's blessings on families in our community and work toward strengthening marriages and fighting against pornography, strip clubs and prostitution, which destroy families. We should pray for those in government - encouraging young

people to pursue careers in public service so that God's desires would be more reflected in the public sphere.

We know that this world is passing away. It is a tear down, not a remodel. But that doesn't mean that we abandon the world and the people in it. God loves every single person on this planet. Every person you pass every day was made in the image of God and therefore has dignity and value and worth - especially to their Creator.

I hope this is helpful to clarify our calling. As a church, our mission is to make disciples - which is a SPIRITUAL purpose involving the transformation of individual lives. But as believers, God sends us out into different parts of the world, with different passions and abilities, to "let justice roll down like a mighty river."

Imagine you have a little **tube of super glue** and you're working to repair something that has been badly damaged – like Mike Wazowski with Boo's door. Our world often feels like it has been put through a wood-chipper – it is so badly broken. Our loved ones get sick and die. People are bought and sold. Babies are summarily executed by irresponsible young men. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The poor are mistreated. Systems are broken and corrupt. This world

But God has scattered His people all over this broken world to be salt and light in it. We are the key to fulfilling the prayer, "Your kingdom come, your will be done." Believers are equipped with superglue to patch up little parts of this broken world.



So when you spend time with a hurting child, or when you help someone get a job, or you encourage a single mom and maybe help with childcare; when you support a politician who is fighting for life or working to reform welfare or fair housing or equal pay; when you foster or adopt a child – you are wielding your super glue for the kingdom.

God's Design will not be fully restored in this world. That complete restoration will take place when Jesus comes back. But we can and should still work toward seeing God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

3. Restoration – We Work for the King's Justice

"They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations." Isaiah 61:4

- Our **Superglue** can fix parts of this broken world, while pointing to the next one.

Let me illustrate all of this with the story of John Perkins. I was privileged to meet Dr. Perkins in February at a conference. He grew up in Mississippi in the '30s and '40s as a sharecropper. You might think that system was in the medieval times but for some people, like Dr. Perkins, it is literally a childhood memory.

Sharecroppers don't own the land they work, they work the land for its owner and share in part of the proceeds from the harvest. It's a system that is bound to be corrupted – and it was - terribly. Workers were always very poor, so they couldn't afford seed for the fields. Owners would sell them seed, at a reasonable rate like 35-40% interest, and thereby reduce the percentage of the worker's take from the harvest (which started at 50% and went down from there). You can see how this system would trap families in an unending cycle of poverty for generations.

That was the Jim Crow South. And it was still like that when we were kids. In some places - do you believe this? - it still is. Injustice and oppression are woven into this present evil age. Just because we don't see or experience it ourselves doesn't mean it isn't there.

That is what John grew up in – an inescapable cycle of poverty that no amount of hard work could break. White Americans usually think in terms of personal responsibility – if you just work hard enough, you should be able to improve your life. That is only true if other things are equal. And in the 30s and 40s in Mississippi, other things were anything but equal. Black people were certainly separate – but they were not equal.

The situation was unjust. It did not reflect God's desires for equal treatment. Isaiah 61:8 says:

3. Restoration – We Work for the King's Justice

“For I the Lord love justice; I hate robbery and wrong.” Isaiah 61:8

- **Our Superglue can fix parts of this broken world, while pointing to the next one.**

The young as as a child and young man, John Perkins was powerless to change his situation. He worked like crazy, having no choice but to drop out of school in the third grade to help his family scrape together enough of a harvest to live on and to bootleg alcohol to supplement their meager living.

The system forced sharecroppers to find alternate means to support themselves. Making and selling illegal alcohol was one such means. Again, middle class Americans tend to think only in terms of individual responsibility, ignoring the reality of systems and structures. Yes, you can teach a man to fish and feed him for a lifetime, but **what if there is a fence around the pond?** What then? Someone might be more than willing to work, but if the work you do is not sufficient to support your family, what options are left to you?



For John, the messy, conflicted system took the life of his older brother, Clyde - shot by a white police officer. Many years later, after coming to Christ at the age of 27 and then returning to his home town, John was being held illegally in the town jail - not charged for anything - he was arrested and held for no reason.

Many of his friends and colleagues - mostly black folks - came to the jail to see what was going on. The white police would not - could not - admit they had done anything wrong and release Reverend Perkins, so there was a standoff. And through the window of the jail, John preached one of his most important sermons.

He pleaded with his people not to return evil for evil. He said if we seek revenge we are no better than they are. He said we follow a God of love and the only way to defeat justice is to conquer it with LOVE. And yet, he said - we must take a stand. We must stand together and the time to stand is now. And just like that, like a bolt of lightning, the idea struck him for a boycott.

His wife got the black community organized – in the late 1960s – to protest the unfair treatment they were receiving in their town. For several months they urged all their friends and neighbors to drive to another county to buy supplies. They marched down Main Street with picketing signs – and they all came together on Saturdays to have a march, chanting “Do right, white man, do right.” You want to hear what they were asking for?

Let me read their demands - p 142

- “We demand that police obey the U.S. Constitution and Supreme Court orders. Persons must be legally arrested, advised of their rights... to phone calls, attorney, clean and healthy containment.”
- the right to only be held in jail when official charges have been filed
- equal opportunity for their children in desegregated schools, as mandated by the federal government three years before, in 1967;
- access for blacks to more and better jobs (the options back then were limited to being a janitor, maid or farmer) including some leadership roles on the school board, welfare board, city police and government offices.
- 30% employment was demanded as blacks made up 31% of the population yet were almost never hired.
- in short, they were standing up for the rights already guaranteed to them in the Constitution but that state and local (white) officials were finding ways to withhold.

John Perkins worked for the King’s Justice in Mississippi in the 1960s. And one day, in 1970, he paid for it. A van full of teens from his church were stopped, for no reason, out in the country, and taken to a jail. John was called and went with two friends to ask the sheriff to let them go. The sheriff (who was white, like all the police in that area in those days) met him his friends on the lawn and that night he was beaten – for no reason – and nearly beaten to death.

But when he came to his senses, he did not feel hate for the policeman who had beaten him – he felt pity. God’s love filled John Perkins with compassion for a white man who was the product of his blind, hateful, racist culture. That policeman didn’t hate John, he hated anything that threatened his power and value. John was a part of the growing civil rights movement and it was threatening not just the power structures in place but the identity of those in positions of power.

Easily the best book I read this year is Dr. Perkin’s autobiography – ***Let Justice Roll Down***. I’ll loan you my autographed copy. Let justice roll down. Dr. Perkins has devoted his life to the cause of justice

and mercy. He is a man of God who loves God with all of his heart, who bleeds compassion and mercy. And he has learned that in this broken world we have to work for and fight for justice, especially for those who are not in a position to get justice themselves.

You and I have little tubes of superglue – touching a few lives here and there. Dr. Perkins has spread more superglue over the south and all of America now than any of us can imagine – patching up places of injustice and handing out tubes and even tubs of superglue to leaders all over the world, with the urging, “get to work!” He has raised up generations of children and young people from poor, urban areas - teaching Gods truth that each of them are unique creations of God for whole Jesus died. He has United dozens of cooperative efforts, giving dignity and power to those who before had no voice and no ability to stand up for themselves. He proclaimed the gospel, demonstrated God’s love and worked tirelessly for the King’s justice.

He came in February and pleaded passionately with EFCA leaders to work together to proclaim the gospel – and keep that central; to demonstrate the love of God and bring His restorative justice to bear wherever and whenever we can.

All of this is Gospel work. Centrally, we Proclaim the Gospel - announcing the arrival of the King. Then, as those who have been transformed by the love of Christ we demonstrate that life-changing love to a world that is desperately hungry - starved - for true love. We focus that love right here in the church - caring for and serving one another, living out the truth of our unity in Christ “so that the world may believe that Jesus is the One who was sent from God.” We proclaim, demonstrate and finally we restore - we work for the King’s justice. We know this world will never fully reflect God’s desires but we patch up the places we know about. Breadcrumbs of love; superglue of justice. Let’s pray.