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A woman hiking on a trail found herself face to face with a hummingbird floating in midair. In later writing about her experience, she said:

The hummingbird stopped and stared at me for a moment. My bright-red shirt had probably attracted him in hopes he'd found the largest flower ever.

What a disappointment to realize I was merely a human and had nothing he wanted.

For a few seconds, we remained motionless as I admired his iridescent feathers and ruby-colored throat. No doubt his little mind was processing the biggest letdown in his life. I felt both guilty and amused that my choice of clothing had deceived him.¹

The author then began to ponder how she has been attracted to things that she thought would bring her joy, only later to be frustrated that they didn't fulfill her hopes.

How often have we done a similar thing as that hummingbird did, flying around, searching for what we think is exactly what we're looking for, only to be disappointed? Or maybe you've searched for something and not been able to find what you're looking for.

That happened to me this week as I was preparing to speak about this scripture from the Gospel of Luke. The passage doesn't show up in the lectionary, which is a suggested listing of biblical texts to use in worship over a three-year period. That means that none of my resources contained any help on this story, which may lead you to wonder why I even selected the text.

Good question! It's one of six scriptures chosen for the General Assembly that will meet at the end of this month, and over the next several weeks we will reflect on these scriptures. They focus on the theme, The Kin-dom of God. That's not a misspelling, as some wondered when they looked at my title this morning. It's an intentional way of rethinking Jesus' phrase, the Kingdom of God.

In that day, when someone mentioned a kingdom, they would have thought of kings and the political leaders of the government. Today we don't often think of kingdoms ruled by a king, for we're used to a political system where many people have leadership roles. Rather than thinking of Jesus

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bringing a kingdom led by a king, it's helpful to think of a kin-dom, where kin folk live together as family.

In Luke's Gospel, the religious leaders asked Jesus when this realm of God was coming. As Disciples preacher Fred Craddock noted in his commentary on this passage, "The reign of God meant different things to different people, but generally it conjured up images of peace, freedom, and prosperity."²

Wouldn't you like to know when peace will surround the earth, when all people will have freedom and have enough resources to live? Oh how we long for that vision of the world to come true, and 2000 years ago, people had the same hopes and dreams of a world without war, where everyone was treated with respect and dignity. So it seems like a reasonable question to ask—when will it happen? Where is it?

Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God doesn't come by counting the days on the calendar. Nor when someone says, 'Look here!' or, 'There it is!'

And why? Because God's kingdom is already among you" (Luke 17:20-21, *Message Bible*).

Those listening must have wondered, "What kind of answer is that?" I imagine listeners grumbling, "Jesus' answer was disappointing. Give us a timeline, at least an approximate one, within a few months. At least tell us if it will happen in our lifetimes so we know when to get ready. Where is this place?"

We like schedules too, don't we? We like to know what's coming, to plan the day, to feel as though we are in control of what's happening.

I imagine Jesus rolling his eyes, wondering how to get across the idea that he represented God's presence on earth, that God's kin-dom was already happening among them, right here and now.

So, he used imagery they would have understood, suggesting that some will point to signs such as lightning filling the sky, a lot of suffering, or people disappearing. I can almost hear the crowd saying, "Ah...now that we understand."

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Some have suggested that Jesus was referring to the end of the world, and even centuries after Jesus lived, people have tried to predict what day the end of the world will occur, with some selling or giving away everything to prepare for the day. When the day didn't arrive, they found themselves disappointed and without money or a home.

Rather the end of the world, I wonder if Jesus was pointing to things that commonly occurred then and now. When's the last time you saw lightning? When's the last time you saw someone suffering? Unfortunately, people are still being abducted and disappearing from our world through the practice of human trafficking. In the struggles of life, the kin-dom is already here as we help one another through these and many other struggles. It's those Jesus was trying to suggest, "Look around at the sufferings in life. Then you will know that my kin-dom is here."

It's interesting that right before the question arose about when God's realm would come, that Jesus healed ten people, and the only one to offer

thanks was an outsider, a foreigner. It's like a snapshot of the kin-dom—a place where everyone is welcome—even outsiders—where healing occurs, and where we give thanks for what God is doing in the world.

I close with a prayer written by Kate Bowler, words that wonder why disaster happens, while also recognizing signs of God's kin-dom among us:

The world is not lost
but sometimes it seems so.
With trees and homes uprooted—
and people's lives alongside them.
With wars raging on and violence unceasing.
With the utter randomness of disaster
and tragedies that don't seem to discriminate.
With hunger and homelessness and pandemics.

Blessed are we who cry out—*How long, oh Lord?*
The suffering we're witnessing is unbearable.
Come quickly.
Bring swift relief and sweet comfort to those in need.

Bless those who have lost everything.
Bless the helpers, the aid workers, the first responders.
Bless the leaders and peacemakers who are swift to act.
Bless the rescue workers, the shelters, the neighbors.

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And bless all those of us who feel helpless in the face
of such evil.

Give us clear eyes and sharp minds and courageous hearts
to know what little we might offer,
to ease pain where we are able,
to bear witness to what demands to be seen.

God, you know the need.

You are the beginning and the ending.
You have not left us alone. Amen.³

The Kin-dom of God. Where is it? It is already here
among us. May you reflect God's presence in your
loving kindness every day.

¹ Tez Brooks, "Distractions," *All God's Creatures: Daily Devotions for Animal Lovers*, July 13, 2023.

² Fred Craddock, *Interpretation: Luke*, 204.

³ Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie, *The Lives We Actually Have: 100 Blessings for Imperfect Days*, 78-79.