

January 21-22, 2006  
Mark 1:14-20  
Pr. Tom Schoenherr

Read from “Caring Conversations” from the 4 Keys.

“Where do you see the Kingdom of God coming near to you? This is a good question to consider in small groups, classes, family devotions this week. Talk about where you see God evident in your life in the Caring Conversations you have this week.

The Kingdom of God has come near to me. I believe that is true. I believe it is true through Jesus Christ and His loving care for me; His death and resurrection for me. I believe it is true through the loving care of small groups for one another. I believe it is true through the love and care that have come to me through my wife, Barb, and through people like you who come along side of me in my times of distress.

This past week I was at Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago for an Advanced Training Seminar in Small Group Ministry. It was a time of continuing education for me, and a time to be re-energized for this essential ministry of the church. I received not only lots of information, but a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. I also discovered that the Kingdom of God came near to me through the care and concern shown for me by people in my group who were there from Annapolis, Maryland, Dallas, Chicago, Philadelphia.

There isn't anything more important than loving and caring for one another, for through us the Kingdom of God comes near and Jesus Christ is given a face.

But when we are going through troubling and distressing times in our lives, we feel very much alone and we pull away from others and into ourselves. We get separated from other people and even from God. God created us for community with God and with one another. He sent Jesus to restore that community and bring us God's healing love.

John the Baptist comes to Galilee proclaiming the Good News of God, and saying, “Now is the time. The Kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the Good News.” Then Jesus sees Simon and his brother, Andrew, fishing and He says to them, “Follow Me and I will make you fish for people.” And Jesus also calls James and John, saying the same thing to them.

Jesus does not say, “You ought to get out there and fish for people. Now be on your way. Good luck.” No. He says, “Follow Me. I will make you fish for people. Jesus is the One who is calling them to take the next step in their lives, and He says that He will teach them, show them, love them into loving and caring for others. In Jesus Christ the Kingdom of God has become personal for us too, and He is near to us.

What is the next step for you? is it joining a small group, or being on the prayer chain to pray for others. It is a personal touch or call that lets us know that the Kingdom of God has come near, because it is through people who are fishing for us in our times of need that we experience the loving care of God, and the Kingdom comes near.

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When Bob Putz's mother died a few years ago, there at the funeral were the members of their small group from here at Good Shepherd. They were there to fish for Bob and Cathy with their love and care, and the Kingdom of God comes near.

A new person walks into Good Shepherd for the first time, knowing no one, and people come up to them, saying, "I don't believe I know you. My name is...", and the kingdom of God comes near. A person is going through a very difficult and distressing time with illness or divorce, and their Stephen Minister comes once a week to listen and to pray, and the Kingdom of God comes near. A high school person is feeling very much alone, not feeling good about themselves or their world, and a Peer Minister gives them a call and stops at their locker at school for a talk, and the Kingdom of God comes near.

When my mother-in-law was living with us and she was near death, it was a time of sadness and feeling very much alone. Randy Webb would ring the door bell and bring in a meal for us, letting us know he was thinking of us and praying for us and the Kingdom of God came near. A small group gathers to pray for someone in the group who is going through a hard time, or a person in the neighborhood whom the group knows who needs help, or they invite a person who does not know Jesus to the group, and the Kingdom of God comes near.

Sometimes the loving and caring that we do for one another may not sound sweet to the ear or the heart. It may be a word that calls us to account, and may sound harsh at the time. But speaking the truth in love can be that way in which God is coming near to us to draw us close to Him and to other caring people.

(Ask the members of caring groups to stand.)

We have been cared for by Jesus Christ who comes into our workplaces, our homes, our classrooms, our hospital and labor rooms, our nursing homes and the dark places of our lives, through people who care. As they care for us the Kingdom of God comes near to us. We see God very personally through the caring faces and the loving touches of peer ministers, Stephen Ministers, our small groups, and people who pray for us.

Jesus touches us personally and invites us to take the next step and come along with Him into adventures of fishing for people. He calls us from our isolation, fear and darkness to be united with Him as He is united in community with the Father and the Spirit. Jesus calls us into community to fish for us and to care for one another, and the Kingdom of God comes near.

Where do you see the Kingdom of God coming near to you?