

I. So, who's in and who's out.

A. Back in May I gave a sermon that reminded us of what Jesus tells us about how we will enter God's realm.

To remind you again, Jesus said,  
"Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

So if we are to take this seriously, which I do, we need to figure out how an infant would receive the realm of God or we're a bit out of luck.

B. I asked for folks to give me what it is that they think it means to receive the Realm as an infant.

The good news is that four people have a shot at entering --- you can figure out the bad news.

So I'm hoping that the rest of the folks that were there that day did seriously think about this and worked out an answer and just decided that letting me know their answer was just not important: which may be true.

- C. What I hope did not happen was that folks just heard the words and just didn't want to bother to figure it out; because, like I said, I take Jesus at his word and I have to believe that such folks will not enter the Realm of God.
- D. And, I have to be honest and say I think there are a great number of people who will not – that's right – **will not** enter the Realm of God.  
In fact, unfortunately, I'd have to say that the vast, **vast** majority of people are **not** "in."
- E. That's right – and now I'm gonna tell you, with all the arrogance of a TV Evangelist – I'm now going to tell you – who's in and who's out.
- II. But to start with we need a couple of clarifications.
- A. First, what is the Realm of God, this place that some will and some will not enter?
1. Well, we're **not**, and I repeat, we are not, referring to God's love and eternal life with God. That is not what is at stake here.

2. The realm of God has a real presence in this world – it's here and now.  
As Jesus said, "The Realm of God is at hand."
3. God's Realm becomes real in this world in those places where God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven.
4. The realm of God is found where there is a radical shift in the perception of value and meaning;  
where value and meaning come not from accumulation, but from emptying.
5. The Realm of God is something that takes place in an individual and is then manifest in the world around them.

**B. Jesus point here is not who will build the Realm; but who, like an infant, will **receive** the realm.**

1. 'Receive' is the operative word here.
2. What does it mean to **receive** the Realm as an infant?
  - a) Those who responded to this question in the earlier sermon said that "receiving it as an infant" is characterized by:
    - (1) Humility
    - (2) With unconditional acceptance and boundless wonderment

- (3) Accept everything – care and gifts
- b) I think these are all on the right track, but I think we really find the answer in that word 'receive.'
  - (1) The Realm is **not** there for the building.
  - (2) It's **not** there for the taking.
  - (3) It's **not** there for the envisioning.
  - (4) It's there for the **receiving**.
  - (5) It is something God gives to us – we just need to be open to receiving it.
- 3. But of course, receiving it radically, **RADICALLY**, changes someone's life, and that's probably why so few get in and so many are left out.
- 4. As Jesus said, [Mat 7:14] For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.  
Or again, [Mat 22:14] For many are called, but few are chosen."
- C. **So who's in and who's out?**  
Those who are in are those who have received the Realm;  
those who have become like an infant, so that their cup is empty and able to receive.

- D. A baby is empty.  
They own nothing, they possess nothing, they have no power, they have not yet filled themselves with things that leave no room.
- E. They are like the ones Jesus speaks of when he says,  
*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*  
Cynthia Bourgeault in her book, The Wisdom Jesus, tells us “poor in spirit” designates an inner attitude of receptivity and openness, and one is blessed by it because **only** in this state is it possible to receive anything.
- F. She shares a story about this young seeker, keen to become the student of a certain master and he finally gets an interview at the master’s home.  
The student rambles on about all his spiritual experience, his past teachers, his insights and skills, and his pet philosophies. The master listens silently and begins to pour a cup of tea.  
He pours and pours, and when the cup is overflowing he keeps right on pouring. Eventually the student notices what’s going on and interrupts his monologue to say,  
“Stop pouring! The cup is full.”

The teacher says, “Yes, and so are you.  
How can I possibly teach you?” [Wisdom Jesus,  
Bourgeault, p. 42.]

- G. We come to the banquet of communion with God and our cups are filled with cheap wine and God comes around with the finest of wines, but our cups are already full and there’s no room for God’s wine.
- H. And to be honest, most of us are running around with cups that are full.
1. Full of things – lots of things.  
Oh how we like our things. Don’t we?  
Our whole culture is founded upon private property and possessions.
  2. We’re full of hatred and vengeance and God knows how much we cling to these and how slow we are slow to forgive.  
All those folks with that vengeful thirsting for the blood of Osama bin Laden – yeh – not in.
  3. We’re full of prejudice – all too ready to find some folks as less worthy or unworthy.  
Maybe it’s the person with the radically different views of life, or different faith;  
maybe it’s the person who is mentally or physically or economically challenged.  
Maybe it’s the person who is unbelievably overweight or maybe it’s pre-judging people who watch reality TV.

4. We get to be so full of ourselves.
5. We're not good Americans if we're not full of pride;  
full of the need to be prideful, have stature and respect and recognition.
  - a) I was driving by a local church and I saw a sign out front that they were having "Self-esteem workshops."  
Now I don't want to be too judgmental, because I really have no idea what they were teaching in these workshops.
  - b) But if I hear Jesus right, the Realm is found not in building up self-esteem, but in not needing, or thirsting for, self-esteem.
  - c) The Apostle Paul tells us,  
"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect.  
For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. [Romans 12:2-3]"
  - d) With Jesus as our example we see that --  
"Though his state was that of God, yet he did not deem equality with God something he should cling to."

Rather, he **emptied** himself,  
and assuming the state of a slave,  
he was born in human likeness."

- I. The Realm is found not in accumulating things, but of emptying ourselves so that, like an infant, we are empty and we can receive the realm of God.
- III. So what does a person who has received the realm of God look like?
    - A. Most of us want fairness and justice in the world and some of us on occasion even miss the good ol' days of hell, when all the 'bad' people justly went to hell.  
When I see self-serving, narcissistic, people flagrantly run red lights, seriously risking killing people in the process, I all too often think.  
*That's what hell is for, people like that.*  
But we, I, need to empty myself of hell.
    - B. Here's an example of someone who has received the Realm of God and has emptied themselves.
      1. We don't really know who this person was, but she wrote a poem that was found next to the body of a dead child in the Ravensbruck death camp, which was a Nazi death camp especially created for women and children. The poem goes...

O Lord, remember not only the men and women  
Of good will, but also those of ill will.  
But do not remember all the suffering  
they inflicted on us;  
Remember the fruits we have bought,  
thanks to  
This suffering – our comradeship,  
Our loyalty, our humility, our courage,  
Our generosity, the greatness of heart  
Which has grown out of all this, and when  
They come to judgment let all the fruits  
Which we have borne be their forgiveness.  
[*Wisdom Jesus*, Bourgeault, p. 74]

**IV. Once you have received the Kingdom,  
the Realm, of God, you can't help but to  
live in the Realm.**

**A. Love and compassion and building the  
Realm around you just becomes second  
nature; and I think that is why most are  
afraid,  
yeah afraid,  
afraid to empty our cup and receive the good  
wine.**

- B. Please correct me if I'm wrong, but I see most of us live with one foot in and one foot out of the Realm.
  - C. Sort of like standing at the side of the pool with one foot in the water, and saying –  
“Yah, I'm swimming. Yes Sir, look at me – I'm swimming.”  
Uhm – not really.
- V. So, I'm guessing that you're starting to get the impression that most of us, well...we're “not in.”
- A. We're all just kind of standing at the pool with one foot in.  
We can see the cool refreshing water, and we hear Jesus voice calling us to join him, but were not convinced that diving in is what we want to do.
  - B. To switch metaphors again, we see the light, but we're not living in the light.
  - C. Jesus, who is “in” has shown us a glimpse of the Realm and so we work towards it, we do good things, we love one another and try to build God's Realm as best we can, with just one foot in.

- D. These are all good things and yes we should continue and even maybe on occasion we even take some steps into the kiddy wading pool; taking in, receiving God's realm a little bit at a time.
- E. But until we are willing to receive the Realm as an infant, we are only working with a very fuzzy image of the building plans.
- F. And I tell you this as one who is still trying to get up the courage to dive in; as one who has one foot in and one foot out and occasionally gets up the courage to wade into the kiddy pool.  
I tell you this as one who knows that the Realm of God will only be built as folks jump in.
- G. So I'm reading about how to swim, practicing my strokes, trying to convince myself that I will float.
- H. Now I don't know all of you really all that well, and maybe some of you truly have emptied yourself and received the Realm as an infant.  
In which case, you probably belong up here. And I know that there are those who are "in," but most of such folks we've never heard of because such recognition just really

isn't important to them.

And if someone's bragging that their "in," well – their probably not.

- I. So, I'm a bit like Moses – I can show you the promised land, but I haven't gotten in – but I'm workin' on it and together maybe we can help each other get up the courage to dive in.

## VI. The good news is – God's in.

- A. God's in, so God understands our fear and trembling, our anxiety, our apprehension, our misunderstanding and in many cases our ignorance.
- B. God's in, so God is forgiving.
- C. God's in, so God is redeeming.
- D. God's in, so nothing, NOTHING, can separate us from God's love, now or forevermore.  
AMEN.