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## **Giving the Gift of the Kingdom of God**

**By The Rev. Deacon Leslie "Fergie" Horvath  
Virginia Theological Seminary  
Class of 2022**

As you can imagine, as a deacon for 11 years and now a postulant for holy orders for the priesthood, I'm personally involved in the lives of many parishioners and their families. I hear about wedding plans, babies being born, children graduating, and job changes. I hear about unexpected life changes, particularly when it relates to the health issues of parishioners.

In early July of this year, all of a sudden, it was not someone else's life change in front of me; it was my own. I was diagnosed with cancer. A cancer diagnosis changes you. Earlier in the week, I was just "me." By the end of the week, I was "me with cancer."

From my experience, as the news travels, people who learn you have cancer do one of two things. They either avoid you, not knowing what to say in your presence, or they rally to provide support. I found so many called, wrote, brought meals, sent flowers, and paid a socially distant visit wearing a

mask. They told me they will walk this journey with me, both in presence and in prayer.

It is in these gestures – the active sharing of love, hope, and prayer on behalf of others – that we find the Kingdom of God present among us now.

Yes, the Kingdom is coming – in Jesus himself. But the Kingdom is already here – in you and in me. All the Kingdom needs is to be let loose in the way that's most personal to you and to me. Here are examples.

I met my insurance agent in a parking lot a couple of weeks ago to sign papers. It was necessary to meet with him this way since his office had been closed due to COVID-19. When I finished signing, with my car window rolled down, his six-foot frame with masked face leaned in and asked, "Can I pray for you?" "Of course," I thought to myself!

Right there, in full view of people walking or standing nearby, my insurance agent prayed for me. In that parking lot I got a glimpse of the Kingdom of God, full of love, hope, and prayer offered for me.

After I left my insurance agent, I picked up a pair of glasses from the optician. She had learned of my diagnosis and without hesitation asked, "Can I pray for you?" "Oh, my goodness, yes," I thought to myself!

Again, right there, in full view of people walking or standing nearby, my optician prayed for me. In the middle of her busy office, I got a glimpse of the Kingdom of God, full of love, hope, and prayer offered for me.

Whether it's reaching out to someone with a cancer diagnosis or contacting someone who has been quarantined in this pandemic, we have an opportunity – every single day of the week – to love, to bring hope, and to pray for someone without hesitation.

If the Kingdom of God is the active sharing of love, and hope, and prayer on behalf of others, then as Christians, it should be the main thing we offer each other. In my own experience that particular day, the prayers of my insurance agent and my optician brought the Kingdom of God so close to me, I was overwhelmed with God's love.

If you would like to pray with someone but can't find the words, the Book of Common Prayer is a great resource. Prayers for the sick can be found on pages 458-461. In addition, let me offer these short prayers for you to consider.

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the gift of life, especially the life of \_\_\_\_\_. Let your healing touch be upon her and let her sickness be turned into health. Grant to her relief from pain and hope for the future. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

God of love and mercy, we commend to your care \_\_\_\_\_. We pray for his healing, that he may have strength and courage to face the days ahead. Help \_\_\_\_\_ to know that many are praying for his healing. We know you hear these and all the prayers of your people and for that we give thanks, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Heavenly Father, we pray for \_\_\_\_\_. We love her Lord and we come to you in this time of need. Heal \_\_\_\_\_ and make her whole, that she may have strength for the journey, and knowledge of your unfailing and unending love for her, now and forever. Amen.

Yes, the Kingdom is coming – in Jesus himself. But the Kingdom is already here – in you and in me. All it needs is to be let loose – in a parking lot, in a busy office, or wherever you may find yourself. Give the gift of the Kingdom of God to someone today with love, hope, and prayers.