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I have a friend named Gerlinde. She is German and her husband is American. I met them many years ago when we served together in Hungary, but they lived eight hours away. They have five children, and the youngest, Benjamin, is my godson. In a few weeks, I will have the honor of seeing him confirmed. Recently, when I was talking to Gerlinde on the phone, she informed me that her mother had died back in Germany. I, of course, offered her my condolences. Gerlinde then provided an insight about death that was altogether fascinating to me.

She said to me, “The way I see it, Sarah, is that my mother once belonged to this world, the kingdom of grace, and now she belongs to the next world, the kingdom of glory.”

I find this depiction of life and death to be gorgeous.

The *kingdom of grace* and the *kingdom of glory*.

The *kingdom of grace* is this world—the today, the here and the now, the life we live every day that is marked by struggle and disease and death...it is the now kingdom, where the innocent suffer, where our children die, where our little ones are abducted, where our world's majority cry out for bread, where our relationships fail, where our sleep is disturbed, where our babies die while still in our wombs, where our brains betray us, where our hope dwindles. The *kingdom of grace* is the kingdom we live in every day, every day when we rely on the grace of God to pull us out of bed in the

morning, when we call on the grace of God to close our eyes at the end of day, when we call on the grace of God to receive us when we finally breathe our last breath. The kingdom of grace exists on this side of the grave. **It's the now.**

Ah, but the *kingdom of glory*...well, that's another story. The *kingdom of glory* is the one that exists on the other side of the grave...it is the kingdom ruled by a King who pulls us from our graves and into eternal life...it is the kingdom where we weep no more and suffer no more and die no more...it is the kingdom where our children aren't robbed from our arms, where the long dead and the yet unborn greet one another, where our bodies and souls are finally restored and healed and mended, where our bones and hearts no longer break, where laughter and song are for eternity...the *kingdom of glory* is but a heartbeat away. The *kingdom of glory* exists on the other side of the grave. **It's the not yet.**

And what better illustration of this is there but the fact that within the span of a single day, we weep over the death of a young man named Kent, who never hurt anybody and died far too young...and then we celebrate the birth of a baby boy named Kinnick, who arrived in this world with a blink and a cry and who has the face of an angel if ever an angel were so beautiful...there is the death of a boy named K, and there is the birth of a boy named K...there is the kingdom of grace, rubbing up against the kingdom of glory...

...and that's exactly what's happening here tonight...there is the ash, and then there

is the body and the blood...there is the sentence of death, and there is the promise of life...there is the condemnation and then there is the life poured out...there is the grace begged for, and then there is the glory given...there is the ash, and then there is the cross...there is the now and there is the not yet...

It is God who holds these two kingdoms together, one temporary, one eternal. It is God who answers our sin with death, but it is also God who answers that death with life. For us, this rarely makes sense, and so we wrestle with faith....but that's ok...that's exactly what Lent is for.

Two kingdoms—the today kingdom of grace and the tomorrow kingdom of glory. Tonight, for you, do these kingdoms collide, or do they kiss?