

"A Different Kind of Kingdom"

Colossians 1:13-20

November 21, 2010

Last Sunday of the Church Year

Today is the Last Sunday in the Church Year. Some refer to it as "Christ the King Sunday." It is a time to consider the coming of the kingdom of God and the King who rules that. What is that like?

The word "kingdom" seems to imply a strong and safe place. A king is someone who is powerful and mighty. He rules with power and uses His strength to defeat His enemies. His goal is to acquire more wealth and to expand the territory of His kingdom.

Is that the kind of kingdom we waiting for? Is that the kind of king we are expecting? Many Christians would say "Yes." These Christians are experiencing all the troubles of this world – bad economy, lack of employment, sicknesses, and death. They may also be suffering for faithfully following Jesus Christ. They may miss out on fun things in life because of faithfulness in worship and Bible Study. Friends laugh at them for their beliefs; persecution for their morality; or even reject them. Many Christians churches are struggling to stay alive. Membership is shrinking. Money is shrinking.

Christians become tired of all that. We want to experience success. We want to see big churches, many people flowing in, and lots of money in the church treasury. We want to see the kingdom of God established here and now. Some Christians are waiting for that. Some are putting their hope in Jesus coming to establish the kingdom of God here on earth and to reign for 1,000 years.

Our text today gives a different picture about the Kingdom of God. It says, "[God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to to the kingdom of His beloved Son. We have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

The kingdom of God is not a political one, but a spiritual kingdom. His enemies are not the present problems or people of this world. They are much stronger and much worse. In another

place, Paul writes, “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Eph. 6:12). We are born in the kingdom of darkness. Satan rules this world. We are slaves to sin. We are separated from God. We are on the way to the eternal darkness of hell.

Yet God has triumphed. He has delivered us from that kingdom of darkness. He has freed us from Satan’s control and all evil. He has transferred us to Jesus’ kingdom. He is our King! Jesus has redeemed us. We have forgiveness for all our sins. How did our King Jesus do this?

We expect a king to act with power and might. Our lesson shows us Jesus has power and might. What does it say? Jesus shows us God in the flesh because He is fully God. He is the King of all creation because He Himself created all things in heaven and earth – things which are visible and things which are invisible. All things in the universe hold together because of Jesus. He is the head of the Church and the Church is His body.

Sin had disrupted the universe. The world was disrupted. Humanity was disrupted. God and man were disrupted. Jesus’ job as true God – king of the universe and king of the church – was to bring all things together again just as God had intended and to establish peace – peace between God and man, peace among people, and peace for creation itself. And how would He do that? By His power? By His might? By His strong will alone? No. King Jesus would redeem the world and reconcile the world to God....by shedding His blood on a cross.

What? This makes no sense. A king sheds other people’s blood, not His own. But this is what we see in our Gospel reading for today. It seems like an odd lesson for today – the Last Sunday in the Church Year – Christ the King Sunday. Here is Jesus, on a cross, suffering, bleeding, and dying. He does not look like the Son of God and King of the Universe. There appears to be no great and glorious kingdom here among criminals.

Yet the sign above His head says, “This is the King of the Jews.” The people mock Him derisively with, “If you are the King of the Jews, then save yourself!” The sign and the people are

making fun, but they are also telling a profound truth at the the same time. Jesus *is* a king, but not just for the Jews. He is the king of the universe. But He is the humble and suffering king who does not serve Himself, but others. His kingship is not in saving Himself, but in saving others from sin, death, and the devil. He pays the price for our salvation, “not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death; that [we] may be His own and live under Him in in His kingdom.”

And what is His kingdom? It is not wealth and land and noble people like other kingdoms. His kingdom is made up of liars and cheaters and thieves and law breakers like the criminal next to him on the cross. It is a kingdom of sinners like you and me.

People do not enter this kingdom with great pomp and circumstance, but in very humble and ordinary ways. The criminal next to Jesus heard Him speak forgiveness for the people who were killing him. The Word touched that man and changed him. He says to Jesus, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” In other words, he is saying, “Save me from the kingdom of darkness. Transfer me into your kingdom.” No one noticed this confession of faith and no one noticed God saving this criminal. Jesus simply said, “Today, you will be with me in Paradise.” Today salvation has come to you apart from anything you have done. Today you are a member of God’s kingdom, not in in the distant future. Today.

You and I entered that kingdom just like that criminal. We are sinners just like He was. We deserve nothing and owe everything to God. When a pastor poured water on our heads as babies and spoke Jesus’ Word, that Word changed us. Jesus said to each of us, “Today, you are with me in my kingdom.” No one notices our confession of faith and no one notices God saving us. But it has happened.

As we prepare for the end of the world and the kingdom of God, remember that the kingdom of God is already here. But don’t look for the kingdom of God in success, wealth, and numbers. Don’t look for the king to show Himself in power, glory, and might.

Where do you find the kingdom of God? It's not always in fancy church buildings with many members. The kingdom of God is any place where the Word of God and Sacraments are present. Where do you find the King – the Son of God, the Creator of the Universe, and the Ruler of all things? You will not find Him working with power and might and exhibiting glorious success so that the world praises Him. You will find the King working with water, bread & wine, and simple words from fallible servants like me. Jesus continues to use those humble means will continue to rescue people from the domain of darkness and transfer them into His everlasting kingdom.

This is truly a different kingdom. It is not a kingdom we expect. Many will overlook it and miss it. Many will ignore it or reject it. But it is the way – God's way – the ONLY way to enter into the kingdom of heaven. You are in this humble kingdom now because of God's grace and mercy. You will be in that grand and glorious kingdom later because of God's grace and mercy. You are prepared because He has prepared you. Rejoice in that kingdom now! Wait in anticipation and hope for that kingdom later! Amen.