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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
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Pentecost 9

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s GOOD PLEASURE to give you the kingdom.”

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Sisters and brothers in Christ, these words from our Lord are wondrous words.

These words from Jesus are comforting words.

They are reassuring words.

To know that our good and gracious God DOES NOT dangle the kingdom of heaven before us like some carrot.

That our good and gracious God DOES NOT tease us with the kingdom of heaven.

It is not that God the Father holds out the possibility of the kingdom of heaven, but only if we are worthy of the kingdom of heaven, only if we somehow have God’s good favor.

God does not work like that.

Instead, Jesus tells us that it is the Father’s good pleasure to give us the kingdom.

It is the Father’s good pleasure.

It is the Father’s desire to give us the kingdom.

The Father wants us to have the kingdom of heaven.

So why do we fret about whether we will be saved?

Why do we worry about whether we will be welcomed into the kingdom of heaven?

That to me is a moot point. The future is a foregone conclusion.

The promise of God is set in stone, because Christ Jesus is risen from the dead.

Death has been conquered.

PAUSE

But what is more pressing, and what we should occupy our time is the question of how WE help make MANIFEST, how we help make VISIBLE, the kingdom of God in the here and now?

And this is why Jesus goes on in this text to say things like:

Sell your possessions, and give alms, that is, give to those who are need.

And that is why Jesus says:

Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit.

And that is why Jesus says:

Be ready, not for the future, but for the present day.

PAUSE

Because Jesus wants us to know the kingdom NOW, Jesus admonishes us to do the things of the kingdom NOW.

Sell you possessions, give alms, be dressed for action, light your lamps.

And we could, and we should include among these, other directives as well.

Be diligent in prayer. Serve the neighbor in need.

Visit the sick. Feed the hungry. Clothe the naked.

Provide shelter to the homeless.

Comfort the grieving. Bind up the brokenhearted.

Welcome the lost and lonely.

Attend worship. Read your Bible. Rejoice in the Lord.

Sing the praises of God. In short, give hope wherever you can.

Proclaim the love of God.

And believe, believe, believe in the power of God to transform the world.

But just don't believe it. But also EMBODY the power of God, so that we can transform the world.

Embody the kingdom. Do the things of the kingdom, so that the kingdom of God is revealed not in some far off future, but in the here and now.

For the kingdom then, is not somewhere up there in the sky. The kingdom is not light years away.

God's kingdom IS you and me.

God's kingdom IS you and me.

Indeed, in Luke 17:21, Jesus says, "The kingdom of God is within you."

PAUSE

Now, yes, the Bible speaks of the kingdom as analogous to so many things.

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone sowed in his field.

The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour, until all of it was leavened.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls.

The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind.

The kingdom of heaven is like someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat.

The kingdom of heaven is like...you could put almost anything into that simile, as Jesus does.

To be sure, I imagine that if Jesus were alive today, he might even equate the kingdom of heaven to who knows what.

The kingdom of heaven is like a pile of Lego building blocks that child works with to create some visionary structure.

The kingdom of heaven is like an iPad, like Zoom, like email, with which a person connects with the world.

The kingdom of heaven is like...again, you fill in the blank.

But no analogy, NO ANALOGY is as powerful as saying the kingdom of heaven IS you and me.

That the kingdom of heaven is within us.

That should change how we personally look at our lives and how we live our lives.

PAUSE

Jesus says, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

And the kingdom God bestows upon us is the presence of God in our very lives.

We are after all a residence for God, yes, we are told that our body is the temple of the Lord.

That is a truth I think we often forget.

And so that is a truth of which we need to be reminded.

That you and I embody the kingdom of heaven in us, that we are a house for God's Spirit, for God's presence.

Martin Luther knew this truth.

That is why when Luther described the kingdom of heaven this way.

This comes from Luther's *Small Catechism*, and his description specifically of the petition in the Lord's Prayer that says, "Thy kingdom come."

Luther explains that petition with these words:

"God's kingdom comes indeed without our praying for it," says Luther.

"God's kingdom comes indeed without our praying for it, but we ask in this petition that it may also come to us."

We ask in this petition that the kingdom of heaven may be embodied in us.

You and I are the kingdom.

God's kingdom is personalized in us.

God's kingdom is not a physical place per se. It is not some locale, not some neighborhood, nor some area or region.

No, but God's kingdom is a person, and even more specifically, God's kingdom is comprised of a gathering of people.

And so then, God's kingdom is always breaking in, wherever people are living out the will of God.

God's kingdom is breaking in, wherever people are following the directives of God.

God's kingdom is breaking in, always, even now.

It is breaking in through us.

PAUSE

One of my favorite quotes is a quote of whom I don't even know the author.

And this quote was shared with me back in seminary by a fellow a student.

But I have always remembered it.

The quote is this.

"We should live such that heaven is not a surprise."

"We should live such that heaven is not a surprise."

We should live such that come the day when we cross over into eternity...

The revelation of kingdom of heaven is not a drastic new world unfamiliar to us.

Yes, the kingdom of heaven comes quickly, suddenly, almost unbeknownst to us, like "a thief in the night," say Jesus.

The apostle Paul says it like this, "we shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of a eye."

We go from this life to heaven like that (snap fingers).

And, yes, I am sure that in many ways the kingdom of heaven will be quite different from our reality right now.

That is a given.

But, I do believe that we can prepare for the kingdom of heaven, we can prepare for eternity in God's presence, by welcoming the presence of God into our lives now.

We do that by following God's directives.

We do that by abiding by God's will.

We do that by embracing those many things we listed earlier.

We do that, we prepare for eternity, by embodying the will of God for the kingdom of heaven to come us now, and so then make the kingdom of heaven visible to others.

In short, the kingdom of heaven is personalized in us.

The kingdom of heaven is embodied in us.

The kingdom of heaven is the act of seeing the presence of God stirring in us, and we reflect that presence out into the world.

And so, the kingdom of heaven is something we need not fear.

Suddenly standing before God at the time when we cross over is something we need not be afraid.

Especially if we have already been living now as those we stand before God.

Because we do. We stand before God each and every moment of the day.

But for many of us, we don't think of reality like that, do we?

We don't think of ourselves as constantly standing before God.

It is easier to push God away.

It is easier to say that the kingdom of heaven is that which happens at the end of life.

It is easier to think this way, because then we can take control of our lives.

But, the point I want to make is that ever since we were baptized into Christ...

Ever since we died to sin in the waters of the font and rose from those waters to new life in Christ Jesus...

Ever since our baptism, we stand before God.

We stand in the presence of God, and so we stand in the kingdom of heaven.

This is the realm, the territory of God's kingdom.

Our feet already stand in that foreign land, that in truth is not so foreign, not so alien.

We only await the time when the sky will be rolled back like a scroll, and the Lord shall descend, as that hymn, "It is Well with My Soul," is want to say.

Then, then the kingdom of heaven will break-in in all its glory.

But until then, we kingdom is made visible in us, and that is enough for our souls to be well.

Lord, hasten the day when our faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled be like a scroll,
The trumpet shall sound, and the Lord shall descend;
Even so, it is well with my soul.
It is well (it is well) with my soul (with my soul),
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Thanks be to God. Amen.