

Revelation 7:9-17
Psalm 34:1-10, 22
1 John 3:1-3
Matthew 5:1-12

Sermon November 5th, 2023

Being the Church

Jesus' first great act in the gospel of Matthew, is to deliver his inaugural speech, his first sermon that will define what it means to be the church, to be followers of Jesus.

Jesus starts out this great speech by calling on his followers to welcome the poor in spirit, the rejected, marginalized people, into their community, as God welcomes them into the kingdom of heaven (**Image One**: church welcoming a Muslim Refugee family). The church, the kingdom of heaven, isn't a place for the self-righteous who look down on others. Who lord their possessions, their prosperity over others. This is a place where everyone understands their dependence on God, and uses the gifts God gives them to help create a welcoming society.

For example, when a church welcomes a refugee family into their community (**Image One**) or goes out to a pow wow or a blanket exercise to support an Indigenous community as they seek healing and reconciliation.

Jesus goes on to reassure us that though a consequence of welcoming marginalized people is mourning the many injustices we see happening to them, we are promised that God is a just God who will make everything right.

For example, when we walk with a marginalized group like the Turkish Muslim community, or with an Indigenous group, or with the LGBTQIA2S+ community, we start to see the daily injustices they face (**Image Two**: orange shirt day (an Indigenous person and a non-indigenous person standing together)). We grieve how our world can be so unfair to some groups of people. Sometimes we can feel helpless. That these problems are too big for us to solve.

This is when Jesus turns us back to the promise that God is a just God who will make everything right. And it starts with us, the church, being a welcoming community. Giving the marginalized people we meet a foretaste of the kingdom of heaven (**Image Two**).

This then leads to Jesus' invitation for us to be in service to others. To humble ourselves before others. Helping the marginalized people in our communities in any way we can. When we do this, we will inherit the earth, or in other words, we will make the world more like the kingdom of heaven.

For example, giving of our time and resources to clothe people, to feed people, to build a shelter for people (**Image One**), to stand with people who are being treated unfairly, to speak out on their behalf, using the power we have been given in life giving ways.

A major part of this invitation is our call to social justice. To stand up for fairness, righteousness (**Image Two**). To not only pray or passively hope that God will one day make everything right. But to listen to this invitation to be active participants in revealing God's justice in the world. To love one another as Jesus loves us. Because when we love one another as Jesus loves us. When we love the marginalized people. Then they will experience God. We will experience God.

For example, many churches marched with Martin Luther King Jr. and the African American communities during the civil rights movement. At the national convention in 2013 many of us stood outside the doors of parliament with the Indigenous people in the area to challenge the government to do more to protect Canadian waters, as well as, help Indigenous communities in the north have greater access to clean drinking water (**Image Two**). Many churches have marched with many marginalized groups over the years to say that they will no longer accept the mistreatment of these groups in their communities. Through these movements people experienced God.

But as we walk or march with people to challenge those principalities and powers who keep creating systems of injustice for these marginalized groups. We are to do so peacefully, and with grace. As this is what our saviour does when standing up to the oppressive principalities and powers of his time.

And though Jesus dies on the cross for speaking out against injustice. Through the resurrection, Jesus reassures us that God's justice will prevail. No matter what consequences we face for standing up to injustice non-violently, God's justice will prevail. We will experience new life through taking up our crosses and following Jesus (**Image Two**).

We see this in John's vision of the kingdom of heaven in the book of Revelation. We see the church, the saints, the people, experiencing healing and new life from the consequences they faced for living with humility, for being in service for others (**Image One**), for standing up to the principalities and powers that created the systems and structures in place that lead to the injustice certain groups of people experienced.

This week we recognize All Saints. We remember all those people that came before us who took up this invitation to follow Jesus. Who stood up to injustice (**Image Two**). Who loved the marginalized people as Jesus loved them (**Image One**). Who helped us experience God. Who helped us experience a foretaste of the kingdom of heaven.

We feel inspired by their courage, their faith, their love, to walk in their shoes. To keep hoping in, and speaking out for God's justice to reign in our world. So that the marginalized people in our communities' experience God's hospitality, grace, and love. So that we see God, and God's kingdom at work in our world.

Let us pray, thank you for the saints that came before us. Who showed us the way. We pray for all the marginalized people in Calgary. Help us as the church to stand with them. To speak out on their behalf. To reveal to them the kingdom of heaven. **Amen.**

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