

Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18
Psalm 149
Ephesians 1:11-23
Luke 6:20-31

Sermon Nov 3rd, 2019 All Saints Sunday

God Gives Us the Kingdom of God

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” Whenever I hear Luke’s retelling of Jesus’ beatitudes this line seems to stand out for me. For two reasons. One, it is a challenging line to hear as a person who isn’t poor. How do people with money hear these words of Jesus? Is the point of Jesus’ message to shame and guilt those of us who have money into being more generous? Are we really excluded from the kingdom of God? Isn’t the kingdom of God a place where everyone is welcome? Or is Jesus talking about something totally different here, and we are just not getting it? Questions many have pondered over the years when hearing these words.

When I went down to Peru with my seminary class in 2006 it was the first time I had ever been in a country where the poverty levels seemed to be much more visible. What I learned while I was there was even though many struggled below the poverty line, impacting their lives in negative ways, this impact didn’t deter them from their beliefs in God. In fact, their faith was quite strong. Something I didn’t see as often here in a place where the majority of us live abundantly.

On the long plane ride home, I reflected on my new revelation. The words, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God,” popped into my head. I realized that I depended a lot on money to give me life. And more often than not lived with this constant fear of running out. Of not having enough to provide for my well being. I started to wonder if these fears, this dependency on money blinded me from seeing what God was doing in my life to give me life. Or whether it made it harder for me to trust God to provide for my well-being.

Meanwhile, the Peruvians I walked with while I was in Peru genuinely trusted God with their fate even though they had very little. I was surprised to see how natural it seemed that they were able to see where God was working in their lives to give them life in the midst of their poverty. They even spoiled us with generosity when we were there. They didn’t worry so much about having enough to survive. Maybe, because they didn’t have a lot of money to begin with. So, they didn’t become dependent on money.

Whatever their reason for such faith was, it was inspirational and life changing for me to witness such trust. To see that one doesn’t need all this money to live, or to reflect that generous love to others.

So, when I hear these words, I hear Jesus saying that the poor are able to see and experience the kingdom of God, because they depend on God for life. God becomes the center of their lives, which leads to them seeing God working wherever they go. Moving them to reflect this generous love to others including a group of seminary students from central Saskatchewan.

If those of us with money refocus our attention on God trusting in God to provide. Being okay with the idea of depending on God for life. Welcoming God to be the center of our lives. Then like those who live in poverty, we too see and experience the Kingdom of God touching our lives. Moved by the Kingdom to reflect this love to others. So, maybe Jesus is encouraging us to live more like people who live in poverty, by trusting in God as our source of life.

Second, it is a liberating text to hear standing in the shoes of a follower of Jesus. Luke retells this story to people who are facing persecution and hardship for what they believe in. Jesus gives them hope to endure when saying the “kingdom of God is theirs.”

We hear this story today as we live in a similar world plagued with hardship, grief, and persecution. What Jesus says to us in the midst of this suffering is that the kingdom of God is ours. It is there for us to see and experience.

Today is All Saints Sunday, a day where we recognize all those who have come before us. Those who have faced persecution for standing up for what they believed in. Those who lived in this suffering and grieving world. Those who we remember now as we reflect on their impact in the church, and in our lives. The kingdom of God is theirs.

God gives us the kingdom of God. At first glance, it seems like only those who live in poverty will receive the kingdom. But, then when we see that Jesus is talking to all those who have taken up their crosses and followed him. All those who believe. His disciples. We see that the kingdom of God is for all those who believe.

This is liberating knowing that through our faith in Christ Jesus we receive the kingdom of God even while living in this world where suffering and hardship exist.

Jesus challenges us. Jesus liberates us. Jesus paints a picture for us of what it is like to live in this kingdom. What it is like for the kingdom of God to be ours.

And what we find out is God’s kingdom is steeped around a love that is radical. That is transformative. Love not only for our neighbors, our friends, our family. But, love also for those who hurt us. Love that even has us reach out to our enemies.

It shouldn’t surprise us that Jesus paints a picture of love like this for us to see and follow. Jesus’ love for us is radical and transformative. It often flips our world upside

down. It often touches us in ways we could never imagine. Jesus' love shows us that we are loved even when we feel like we deserve the complete opposite. We see an example of this love when Jesus forgives us as he hangs from a cross. We see an example of this love when he reaches out to the margins of society and connects with people whose status is questionable. We see an example of this love whenever he comes into our lives and lifts us up again.

Unfortunately, some hear this section in our gospel, and use it to sanction violence. Or they convince themselves that to love those who hurt them means to continue to live in this cycle of abuse. Another line that stands out to me is where Jesus says, pray for those who abuse you. Not stay in the relationship. Pray. Loving our enemies will not always lead to reconciliation, but through prayer, we can let go of the anger within ourselves, and hope that God can turn their hearts. Like us, who in our sinful moments, see God transforming us into something new.

For the Saints, they consistently prayed for those who persecuted them. One example I can think of is when Stephen a follower of Jesus says a prayer for those who are stoning him to death. Like Stephen, many Saints fell at the hands of persecutors, and yet, the last words they uttered were words of forgiveness and love.

The love we experience in the kingdom of God is out of this world love. It changes us knowing that even in our worst God still loves us. Even in the midst of our persecution and suffering, God's love still prevails.

Let us pray, loving God, we give thanks for your kingdom come. May we depend on you for life. May you give us the strength, patience, and wisdom to love even those who hurt us. And may we continue to be a voice for those who live on the margins of our society. In Jesus name we pray, **Amen.**

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