

Sermon August 8th, 2021

Jesus Invites into the Kingdom of God

Last week we reflected on the first section of Jesus' "I am the bread of life" sermon. The section where Jesus invites us to depend on Jesus for our survival and our well-being. Like we do with food. The section where Jesus invites us to believe in Jesus' vision and mission for the world. The section where Jesus invites us to believe that Jesus is our bread (**Image**) who will satisfy our rumbling tummies, and quench our thirst in this scorching smoky heat. Giving us opportunities to experience all that life has to offer.

As we turn our attention to our gospel this morning, we hear the second section of Jesus' "I am the bread of life" sermon. In this section, Jesus promises us that with accepting this invitation to believe in Jesus, we receive something more than experiencing all that life has to offer. More than experiencing God's kingdom come. More than experiencing God's healing, hospitality, and love. More than being participants of revealing this kingdom come to others. This healing, hospitality, and love to others. If we accept Jesus' invitation, we will inherit eternal life. If we eat of the bread of Jesus (**Image**) we will live forever.

Jesus ups the ante. Not even death will stop us from living out Jesus' vision and mission for the world. Not even death will take away our opportunity to experience the kingdom of God in its fullness. Sounds inviting, doesn't it?

As believers, we walk by faith, we see moments where God's healing, hospitality, and love touches our lives in the here and now (**Image**). We reveal this healing, hospitality, and love to others giving them glimpses of God's kingdom come.

Unfortunately, even as we walk by faith, we still experience suffering in this world. We still experience lows along with the highs. We still find ourselves wondering when Jesus will come again to make everything right. We only see God's kingdom come in glimpses. Not yet in its fullness.

This is what makes Jesus' promise to us so inviting. In life after death, Jesus says we will suffer no more. We will shed no more tears. We will experience healing from our wounds. We will receive new life. We will be welcomed home. Or in other words, we will live in the fullness of God's kingdom. We will live in the fullness of God's healing, hospitality, and love. We will see more than just glimpses of this kingdom.

Now we all have different views of what life after death looks like and how it is related to the last day. But, whatever our beliefs are about this theological inquiry, the idea of living in the fullness of God's kingdom is comforting. Especially, when we only have one foot in the kingdom in this world.

To suffer no more. To cry no more. To heal from our wounds. No longer carrying around all that baggage **(Image)** that weighs us down in this life. To live in peace and harmony with one another. To have all our needs met. To be welcomed for who we are. This invitation has become a lot more delicious with this new sweetener Jesus has added to this cake **(Image)**.

Especially, when we are sitting at the bedside of a loved one, holding their hand, doing everything we can to take their pain away, as they suffer from a terminal illness **(Image)**.

Especially, when we sit in our living room day after day alone. Grieving the death of our spouse who we had been happily married to for many years. Longing to be reunited with them.

Especially, when we feel exhausted from all the ups and downs that come with living with a mental illness. Sometimes we find ourselves in recovery, and everything is going well. Then we run into a trigger. And the mental illness we are struggling with is back in full force **(Image)**.

Especially, when we feel so hurt by the break down of a relationship, and the baggage that weighs us down as we try to enter into new relationships.

This invitation has become much more desirable, when the end game is living in the fullness of God's kingdom.

For the people who are listening to Jesus on that beach they are suffering. Many are living in poverty. Doing everything in their power to survive. Feeling the weight from the oppression they face living in the Roman Empire.

Many are unwanted widows or divorcees who now need to redefine their role in a society that tells them they are no longer welcome. Many are people in undesirable professions who have been labelled as sinners. Many are sick from something that makes them unclean. Almost all those who follow Jesus are marginalized by their communities.

They are exhausted. Desperate for some reprieve from their suffering. To believe that there is a better place where they don't have to face these sufferings sounds dreamy. Where do we sign up?

Our beliefs in life after death comfort us and give us hope when we face suffering in our lives. It reassures us that our suffering will not last forever. That one day we will reunite with those who have gone before us. That we will one day find ourselves standing in the fullness of God's kingdom.

A place where we are welcome with all our wounds and differences. A place where God is front and center in our lives. A place where we suffer no more.

This belief carried many faithful people throughout the years through some challenging times. I'm sure if we reflect on our own lives, we can say the same.

So, in this sermon that Jesus delivers on the beach near Capernaum we see an invitation to believe that through Jesus God's kingdom come breaks into our world. We don't get to experience it in its fullness, because we still have suffering in our world as well. But we do see glimpses of it. We see moments where God's kingdom come touches our lives (**Image**). These moments give us hope that God is working in our world, healing and redeeming it.

In this sermon, we also, see the invitation to believe that through Jesus we receive eternal life. That even after death we will experience the kingdom of God. Accept we will experience this kingdom in its fullness. We will experience God's healing, hospitality, and new life in its fullness. No more tears. No more suffering. God will stand among us. Welcoming us home.

We are invited to be participants of God's kingdom come in this world, and also to be recipients of God's kingdom in the after life.

As Jesus comes to the conclusion of his "I am the bread of life" sermon Jesus draws us back to the world. Jesus says he will give up his life so the world can live.

Jesus' invitation to eternal life isn't so that we can forget about this world. Jesus' invitation to eternal life isn't so we can just look after ourselves, and do the right things so we can get accepted into heaven (**Image**). Jesus' invitation is for us to believe in all that God's kingdom, God's healing, hospitality, and love has to offer both in this world and in the world to come. To be participants of God's kingdom come in this world. To reveal to people Christ's love. Christ's hospitality. Christ's compassion for the marginalized. Christ's healing and redeeming work. Christ's gift of eternal life.

We are very much to care for this world. To take care of all of God's creatures (**Image**). While still finding hope in a resurrected life.

Yes, the after life is comforting for us. It gives us hope that God's healing and redeeming love overcomes even death. But, the after life wasn't meant to be a distraction from our work as Christ's disciples in this world. If anything, the after life was meant to be a motivator for us to keep doing Christ's work in this world (**Image**). To try to show people that good things do happen in this world. Our world isn't a 24 hour a day news broadcast. There is a lot of good happening in our world. If there wasn't then Christ coming here was for not.

All Christ's work and sacrifices during his ministry were for not. If all this world has to offer is suffering. Sometimes it might feel that way when we are living through a pandemic or grief or a mental illness or a break down of a relationship. But God's kingdom has come. God is at work in our lives. Sometimes we have to focus a little

more to see it in this world. But God is at work in our lives healing us. Redeeming us. Loving us. Welcoming us. And when our time comes to say goodbye to this world in its current state, we will see the fullness of God's kingdom. We will see a redeemed world in its fullness.

And we will recognize this place, because we have already seen glimpses of it in this life.

Let us pray, gracious God, we give thanks for your invitation to live in your kingdom forever. Comfort us with this invitation. Give us hope in this invitation that no matter how much we suffer in this life we will suffer no more when we enter your kingdom in its fullness. Encourage us to see that your invitation isn't just a ticket to the afterlife, but also, to be participants of your kingdom come in this life. To reveal your love and grace to everyone and everything we meet. **Amen.**

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