

Sermon September 27th, 2020

Jesus Invites Us to Experience the Kingdom of God

When Jesus comes to the disciples Jesus invites them into a new way of life. A way of life that is very different from the life they are used to living. A life that is centered on God's kingdom, not a life centered on the Roman Empire.

Throughout Jesus' ministry we see that the kingdom Jesus is talking about is in direct conflict with the world the Empire has established for its people. For example, Jesus talks to his disciples about showing hospitality to everyone they meet. The Empire assigns people to different social groupings based on their financial status or ethnicity or religious affiliation or job occupation or age or gender. With some social groups being given more respect and status than others. Creating an image of people in lower status groups that causes those in higher status groups to fear them or judge them. Jesus shares a parable with us today where the people who are living in lower status positions are lifted up in the eyes of God. Hospitality is for everyone not just the leaders, royalty, and high-status social groups. This must have been a challenging message for those who stood in positions of power to hear.

Jesus encourages his disciples to offer forgiveness seventy-seven times, which means all the time. Jesus even challenges his disciples to love their enemies. To pray for those who persecute them. The Empire punishes people who wrong them by hanging and nailing them to crosses. Watching as they suffer a tortuous death. Their well-known motto was to make peace through war.

Jesus talks about the importance of devoting our time and energy to God through prayer, worship, dwelling on scripture, and in service to others. The Empire talks about devoting all one's time and energy to bettering the Empire's lot in the world, and to worship the Emperor.

Jesus encourages those who follow him to be generous with their possessions. To help those in need. The Empire creates an image of scarcity through abusive taxation policies so one will depend on the Emperor for everything they need. The Empire also marginalizes those in

need. Creating a caricature of them that makes those who have the means to not want to help them.

Throughout Jesus' ministry we see the message he is preaching to his followers is in direct conflict with the message the Empire is trying to sell. We see this come to a head in our gospel when Jesus gets so frustrated with the religious leadership of his day, because in his mind, they continue to lead with strong influence from the Empire. Instead, of leading by God's way. So, Jesus says that the tax collectors and prostitutes will experience the kingdom of God before they will, because these people in lower status positions in society are listening to what Jesus has to say. And what Jesus is saying and doing is the way of the kingdom of God.

So, by following Jesus. By listening to his teachings, and doing what Jesus is doing we experience the kingdom of God. We experience the hospitality, the forgiveness, the devotion, and the generosity that Jesus has to offer.

Now like every generation before us, we too struggle to live out the kingdom of God in our world. We too live in an Empire that shapes and dictates how we are supposed to live. A way of life that often is in conflict with our call to live like Jesus.

How often do we struggle to show hospitality to people who are different from us, because we are bombarded with messages that create this sense of fear in us about these people (**Image One**)? Or messages that harden our hearts making us more likely to judge these people?

How often do we struggle to forgive those who have hurt us? How often does anger get the best of us leading us to act in unhealthy ways? Maybe even acting out violently towards our neighbour?

Do you struggle to devote time and energy to your faith? Do you feel like you pray enough or worship enough or dwell on the scripture enough? Do you find yourself working more and more hours trying to get ahead, and yet feel like you are in quicksand? How much time do you dedicate to making money versus to God (**Image Two**)?

Are you constantly afraid that you will not have enough? Do you lose sleep over these worries? How does this fear of not having enough affect your ability to be generous to others?

We hear a lot of messages that challenge us to live out the teachings of Jesus in our lives. Messages that tell us to fear and judge others. Messages that tell us to get even with those who hurt us. Messages that tell us that violence is okay. Messages that tell us that we need all these possessions to make us happy, and that the only way to do this is to work, work, work, so we can make lots of money to afford these possessions. Messages that have us materializing so much of our lives.

During this pandemic we have heard a lot of messages about not having enough. Not enough groceries on the shelves (**Image 3**). Not enough hospital beds or ICU beds for patients. Not enough teachers in the classroom. Not enough money to keep you employed. We hear a lot of messages about not having enough, which causes us to live our lives clinging to what we have, or hoarding so we don't run out, instead of living generously. We hear a lot of messages in our everyday lives that conflict with the messages we hear on Sunday morning.

Yet, despite these messages and the influences they have on us, Jesus stays patient with us. Jesus graciously invites us over and over again to follow him. Everyday. Jesus invites us to stand with the tax collectors and prostitutes. To live in the presence of the kingdom of God. Because, when we live out the teachings of Jesus, we create a community that is hospitable to others (**Image 4**). We create a community where forgiveness is nurtured and encouraged leading to healthy and thriving relationships within our community. We create a community that is devoted to dwelling in God's presence. We create a community that is generous (**Image 5**). We create a community where we are living in the presence of the kingdom of God. Where others who encounter our community experience this kingdom come.

Let us pray, loving and gracious God, sometimes we struggle to follow you. Sometimes the other messages we hear in our world distract us from living out the kingdom of God in our community and in our world. We give thanks for your patience and grace, as we try to live out this kingdom life. Give us a listening ear and a dedicated heart so we are able to live in the presence of the kingdom of God. **Amen.**