

Jonah 3:1-5, 10
Psalm 62:5-12
1 Corinthians 7:29-31
Mark 1:14-20

Sermon January 21st, 2024

The Kingdom of God has Come Near

In our gospel, Jesus comes preaching that the kingdom of God has come near, and that we need to let go of all those thoughts, feelings, words, and actions that make it harder for us to hear and see what Jesus is going to say and do in his ministry to reveal to us the presence of this kingdom in the here and now (**Image One**: someone repenting).

We need to let go of our anger, hate, guilt, shame, fear, anxiety, neglect, complacency. We need to let go of our hurtful words, actions, and inactions that are motivated by these feelings. Blinding us from seeing the good that God is doing in and around us. Stopping us from being active participants in Christ's healing and redeeming work in our community. Stopping us from being the gracious, hospitable, loving people God has created us to be.

In the book of Jonah, God has invited the people of Ninevah to repent for their harsh treatment of God's people. In response to this invitation, the people of Ninevah repent (**Image One**). In response to their repentance, God chooses to show them mercy, and forgives them. Breathes new life into them. What good news this is!

Unfortunately, Jonah is so angry at what the people of Ninevah did to his people that he wants to see them destroyed. "God is a just God who will destroy our enemies," When they are not destroyed, but forgiven. Jonah laments to God. Jonah's anger blinds him from seeing the healing and redemptive work God has been doing through Jonah in Ninevah. Jonah becomes bitter. Incapable of being the gracious, hospitable, loving person God created him to be.

Like Jonah, our anger, our feelings of hate, guilt, shame, fear, anxiety, neglect, complacency. Our hurtful words, actions, and inactions make it harder for us to see where God's healing and redeeming work are at work in our lives and in our community. Make it harder for us to see God's kingdom present in the here and now. Make it harder for us to experience God's grace, hospitality, and love. Make it harder for us to be the gracious, hospitable, loving people God created us to be.

When we can go through a process or ritual to help us let go of all of our junk (**Image One**). Then our eyes are open to seeing God's healing and redeeming work happening in our lives and in our community. Then our hearts are open to seeing the grace, hospitality, and love that is present in the world. Then we are open to live out this

grace, hospitality, and love in our community. The very grace, hospitality, and love that defines the kingdom of God (**Image Two**: a community showing hospitality to someone).

Jesus goes on to invite us to follow him, to experience the kingdom of God through his ministry. We do this by remembering and reflecting on the gospels, the epistles letters. Stories that tell us about Christ's ministry.

We remember and reflect on the stories where Jesus feeds the hungry on the beaches of Galilee (**Image two**).

We remember and reflect on the stories where Jesus walks with, and speaks out for the women he meets. Like the woman who is about to be stoned to death or the Samaritan woman at the well or the Canaanite woman with the sick child or the hemorrhaging woman who touches his cloak or Mary who is scolded by her sister for sitting at Jesus' feet with the other men. Jesus listens to them, defends them, and affirms them. Opening their hearts to see God's grace, hospitality, and love. Empowering them to live out this grace, hospitality, and love in their lives and in their communities.

We remember and reflect on the stories where Jesus hangs out with those who have been rejected by their community despite the protest he receives from the religious authorities (**Image two**). Like the tax collectors and sinners.

We remember and reflect on the stories where Jesus heals the sick. Like Peter's Mother-in-Law, or the paralyzed man on the matt, or the blind man in Bethsaida, or the boy who struggles with seizures, or the little girl who is pronounced dead at the scene.

We remember and reflect on the stories where Jesus reaches out to the Gentile, the Samaritan (**Image two**). Like the Samaritan woman at the well, the Roman Soldier's daughter, the Canaanite woman, the Gentile leper.

We remember and reflect on the stories of the early believers, where through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' disciples continue to heal the sick. Feed the hungry. Speak out for women. Welcome the rejected. The Gentile. The Samaritan. Where Jesus' disciples continue to reveal to people where God's grace, hospitality, and love are at work in their lives, and in their communities. Where Jesus' disciples continue to be the gracious, hospitable, loving people God created them to be (**Image two**).

As we continue to be the church today, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we continue to feed the hungry. We continue to speak out for women, empowering them for leadership in the church. We continue to stand with the marginalized people in Calgary, the visible minorities, the LGBTQIA2+ community, those who are living in poverty, the Indigenous communities. Speaking out for them. We continue to heal the sick through prayer,

support, ritual. We continue to welcome people from all walks of life. Being the gracious, hospitable, loving people God created us to be (**Image two**).

We continue to reveal to people that the kingdom of God is present. We proclaim this message whenever we take up our crosses and follow Jesus. Whenever we live out our faith in our daily lives. As individuals. As community.

Let us pray, gracious God, help us let go of all of our junk, and empower us through this repentance and forgiveness to be active participants in your ministry wherever we are. Being gracious, hospitable, loving to everyone we meet. **Amen.**

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