

Sermon for Proper 19 It Is the Father's Pleasure to Give You the Kingdom

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20 Psalm 50:1-8, 22-23 Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 Luke 12:32-40

The readings for today have reminded me that I am full of hope. It is not the wishful thinking sort of hope like, "I hope my laundry dries before it rains", and it's not the optimistic "There's always a silver lining" sort of hope but rather, *this* hope is the deep, joyful, Christian hope born in the faithfulness and love of God and of the knowledge that Jesus has saved me...has saved us. This hope is for the kingdom of God – the sure and certain hope that God will keep his promises. This hope is part of our faith in God and love for God.

It is the hope that brings the kingdom of God – and we must be ready. But ready for what? The kingdom of God is already here – Jesus' birth brought that kingdom to earth and Jesus' death and resurrection brought that kingdom to each and every one of us. The kingdom of God isn't some mysterious other-worldly place that we can't see. It's here. We're living in the kingdom of God. "Do not be afraid, little flock," Jesus says, "for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Jesus provided entry into the kingdom through his death and resurrection. How is that possible?

It is possible through baptism. We do not "do" baptisms today like they are meant to be done because that would be messy. We are meant to be plunged into the deep water – dying with Christ – and then we are lifted up out of the water – rising to new life with Christ. How this is true – that we die with Christ and are raised with Christ – is a mystery that we cannot fully explain because it is God who does the work here.

Baptism is our acceptance of God's invitation to enter into his kingdom, to become a child of God. But this is not a 5-minute event that is completed at the font. Baptism, as Jesus showed us, takes a life-time to fulfill. We live our baptismal promises every day as Jesus did...feeding the hungry, fighting injustices and inequality, bringing God's love and true freedom and peace into this broken world.

Jesus' baptism was consummated on the cross where he showed us that the world's broken power structures were no match for God. The worst they had to offer was death and God showed us that he has the power even over that. Raising Jesus from death into life, with a body that would never die again, was the moment when Jesus – the human from Nazareth – fully entered into God's kingdom. And because Jesus did, that is what waits for all of the baptized as well.

Our baptisms, because they begin our lifetime journey in God's kingdom, form the foundation of everything else we do here. In baptism, we become a part of Christ's body, the church – marked as Christ's own forever. And so each time we gather as the church, it is a renewal and celebration of being Christ's body. Each time we take bread, Christ's body, we relive our part in the mystery of being Christ's body.

Baptism is an acknowledgment of faith and commitment to that faith. Belief in God means belief in what God has promised that he will do – and that is to bring us and the world to perfection, the perfection first seen in Jesus.

Today, Isaiah reminds us that our faith gives us a hope that is deep-rooted and prevents us from simply going through the motions or from just paying lip-service to our faith. It is the hope that gives our sacramental actions deep meaning for us

– when we stand or kneel in prayer, when we see the bread being broken, when we drink from the cup, when we share the peace with each other. It is the hope that reshapes these *sacramental* actions into *daily* actions that seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for those neglected, grieving, and those without means. As Christ's body, we are tasked with embodying God's kingdom in the world as Jesus did. That means living out our baptismal ministries in lives of action that show God's kingdom to the world.

As Jesus lived the kingdom life, so now do we. "Sell your possessions," Jesus tells us, "and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Our hearts are in God's kingdom and the treasures of God's kingdom are love, justice, peace, and equality.

Jesus tells us to be dressed for action and to have our lamps lit. It is a reminder that we are always waiting. We are not to become complacent, to forget what we are waiting for. What we are waiting for is the complete fulfillment, the full realization, of God's kingdom – when every living creature lives in unity with each other and with God. Jesus tells us today that he will come again to bring this fulfillment and he wants us to hold on to the sense of urgency of that news, an urgency that will keep us working towards that fulfillment.

In the Book of the Revelation, we're told that the new Jerusalem will descend to earth to mark this complete fulfillment and, in this place every week, we pray for this complete achievement of God's kingdom when we say, "Thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done on earth” just like it is in Heaven. That is our hope. “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

But, we *are* afraid. It is so easy to be afraid when we misplace our hope. When we start placing our hope in the things around us, it is easy to be frightened. When we put our hope in money, in people in the pews, in worldly things...we get frightened. We worry that we don’t have enough...that we won’t have enough...or that what we do have will somehow be taken away from us. “Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out,” Jesus tells us, “make an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” And I add...where your heart is, there is where your hope is also.

Our hope cannot and will not be passive. When our hope is with our heart and our heart is with God, we will act. We cannot and will not sit back and wait for everyone in the world to get along and love God. We cannot and will not wait for the world’s problems to get better. It won’t happen. We must partner with God. When our hope is with our heart and our heart is with God and we truly understand we *are* living in God’s kingdom...we *will* act. We won’t be able to stop ourselves. We live in the kingdom – that is *so* exciting. And we have the power – God’s power working in us – to help others, to help this world, discover life in God’s kingdom with us.

This is tough task when it often doesn’t feel like we’re living in the kingdom. Our world has many horrible people doing horrible things. Christian hope doesn’t ignore the world’s bad stuff – the grief, the poverty, the killing, the destruction of our planet. Our hope survives through this because we are working towards a

common goal with God. Jesus inaugurated the kingdom – he embodied the kingdom – and now as his body here on earth, we continue the work, with God, of bringing about the fulfillment of God’s kingdom. And it is work. Jesus tells us today that when he does come back, he will be like the master who serves his workers. It is a flipping upside-down of the way the world views power. The rich and powerful must relinquish their love and reliance on their riches and power. But it isn’t just the so-called “rich and powerful” who must give up this way of thinking. Every single one of us finds comfort and security in our money and in our material goods. The key, as we heard last week in the parable of the rich fool and as Jesus reminds again this week, the key is to remember that God is the source of all good things. We do not love our money and our homes as an end in themselves and forget about God. Seek first the kingdom. The rest will come. As the saying goes, “money doesn’t buy happiness.” It also does not give you eternal life in the coming perfection of God’s kingdom.

I heard someone say that Christians are only good at doing what’s easy – they only give away what they don’t want anyway. That stuck with me because it’s true...but only to a certain extent. It is true that when I bring stuff to St. George’s to sell in our yard sale it is because I don’t want it anymore. But I also give away what I do want – my time, my energy, my love, my service. That, I believe, is true of you as well.

When our hope is with our heart and our heart is with God, we will work not for our own desires but for what God desires for us. The words I constantly have floating through my brain are Jesus’ words in the Garden of Gethsemane when he was facing an excruciating death on the cross – of course he did not want that

death yet he said to God, “not my will, but yours.” I try to allow those words to guide everything I do and this brings me back to where I started today.

Remember that we have hope – inseparable from God’s love because our hope is that love – God loves us so much that he wants to bring about the fulfillment of his kingdom here on earth – that every creature will live together in God’s love. Jesus pointed the way...he showed us with his life how to love God. He showed us with his life how to love everyone – especially those not loved by the world. We continue this task by showing the world, with *our* lives, how to love God and how to love others both inside and outside of these walls.

I pray the same for you that I pray for myself – that God will keep us strong in our hope for His everlasting kingdom, guide us in our work of bringing this about by remembering the words, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”