

Pentecost 2, 6.14.2020

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Exodus 19:2–8a; Psalm 100; Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:20

“Proclaim the Good News”

*Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

Good morning. Thank you for joining us online for worship at St. Mark’s Lutheran Church. Today we are reminded that Jesus sends his church into the world to proclaim the good news. The world continues to be a place in need of healing; a place separated from God by unclean spirits - spirits of hatred, racism, and injustice. The church is to proclaim in word and deed the compassionate kingdom of heaven that is Christ Jesus.

St. Matthew tells us that when Jesus “*saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*” Jesus is a compassionate king. Jesus is concerned about healing and freeing people from the demons of the world and welcoming them into his kingdom. The word “compassion” comes from the Latin word “*compassio*,” meaning, “to suffer with.” Jesus is the compassionate king who suffers with and offers healing to the world.

Everywhere Jesus went he proclaimed good news of the kingdom and restored people to wholeness.

Yet in 2,000 years, some things have not changed very much. People continue to be “harassed and helpless,” challenged by illness, pandemic, economic need, injustice, racism, discrimination, and by ideologies of every kind. The world and its kingdoms continue to treat people harshly.

People continue to be in need of Christ Jesus, the compassionate king.

In Jesus’ day, what angered both religious and political leaders, was that Jesus proclaimed good news that the kingdom of heaven had come near. Jesus proclaimed a kingdom with final authority over all other kingdoms and their rulers. In the tradition of Jewish prophets, Jesus proclaimed a kingdom of healing, compassion, justice and love.

Jesus intentionally uses the Greek word “*basileias*” (βασιλεία) which is translated as “kingdom.” By using the word “*basileias*,” Jesus was saying that his kingdom is in contrast to all the other kingdoms of the world. The good news of the kingdom as told by the Magi at Jesus’ birth, terrified King Herod, so he sought to kill the baby Jesus. Jesus’ fellow Jewish leaders misunderstood him, and also sought to kill him. The world and its leaders continue to be afraid of the power of Jesus, because healed and set free by Jesus, people will transform the world and its rulers. The world fears Jesus, wishes to silence Jesus, wishes to domesticate Jesus, because proclaiming the good news has

the power to transform the world.

Jesus knows his disciples will be in danger with his message. He knows they will face persecution and even death in the world. Jesus tells his disciples and us, “*See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.*” Jesus tells his disciples they will be dragged before governors and kings because of him. Jesus makes it very clear to his disciples that if they proclaim the kingdom, it will put them in direct conflict with the kingdoms of this world - kingdoms that stand opposed to the reign and rule of Jesus’ compassionate kingdom. The world would much rather have a domesticated Jesus, a non-threatening Jesus, a Jesus who supports the status quo.

Recall the three temptations Jesus underwent in the wilderness. The third and final temptation (Mt. 4:8-10) was to worldly power and authority. Satan tempted Jesus by showing him all the kingdoms of the world, saying, “*All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.*” Jesus said to him, “*Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’*” The powers of evil want the church to forget this “compassion nonsense,” and preach gospels of wealth, social manipulation, consumerism, and ideologies about the kingdoms of this world.

Yet today in this nation there is a holiday named for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. because he proclaimed the kingdom of heaven, but in his day he was repeatedly harassed, jailed and finally murdered in Memphis in 1968. But not only in this nation, Christians around the modern world continue to suffer for their faith. In 1980, Roman Catholic bishop Óscar Romero, Archbishop of El Salvador, was murdered by gunmen as he stood at the altar celebrating mass, because he had proclaimed Christ stood with the poor and oppressed in his country. In 1972, Chinese Christian evangelist, Watchman Nee died in a labor camp prison after being imprisoned for his faith for 20 years by the Chinese Communist government. Watchman Nee left a note in his prison cell that read, “Christ is the Son of God who died for the redemption of sinners and was resurrected after three days. This is the greatest truth in the universe. I die because of my belief in Christ.”

Dr. King, Bishop Romero, Watchman Nee, and countless others knew the dangers of following Jesus, of seeking justice for the “harassed and helpless” of the world. They proclaimed the good news of God’s kingdom here on earth, because this is what Jesus proclaimed, and Jesus, too, was killed by the world, and the charge against him posted on his cross, “The king of the Jews.” Jesus’

proclamation of the kingdom was his crime.

The kingdom that we proclaim as Jesus' followers is in the world, but not of the world. Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, we pray "*thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*" When Jesus taught his disciples to pray he made it clear that his disciples are to pray for and work for the Father's kingdom "*on earth as it is in heaven.*" As Jesus' disciples, we are to do the will of the Father, following Jesus the servant king, so that the weak and helpless of the world might hear good news of redemption and release.

Jesus knowingly sends us into a place of danger and wolves saying, "*As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.*" We cure the sick when we assure people they are made whole and their sin is forgiven. We raise the dead to new life when we baptize people into the death and resurrection of Christ, and welcome the hopeless and despairing to a place at the Lord's table of grace and forgiveness.

We cleanse the leper when we go to anyone who has been pushed out to the margins of society for fear they are contagious, because the world continues to treat those who are different, feared, misunderstood, as lepers. The world continues to keep certain people on the margins because of the color of their skin, the nation of the origin, their gender identity, you name it, the world continues to treat some people as lepers and outcasts.

Jesus sends his disciples to cast out the demons that continue to possess humanity – demons that cause people to consume and be consumed by alcohol, drugs, gambling, and a consumer culture that possesses people to possess more of everything. But there are other more insidious and subtle demons in the world: nationalism, imperialism, denominationalism, sexism, classism, and racism continue to haunt humanity - and we are all affected by them. Anyone who is willing to look deeply inside themselves will see the effects and scars of all of these "isms" because we have all been possessed by, and placed under the spell of the demons and spirits of the world. Our world continues to be torn apart by demonic powers that dehumanize others. Jesus comes to heal and liberate us so that we might become heralds and ambassadors of his kingdom. Jesus needs each of us; Jesus needs each of our voices and our hands for his kingdom.

As ambassadors of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus' disciples are to take no money, no luggage, no excessive possessions. Jesus sends his disciples not with a gospel of wealth, but a gospel of

liberation from every demonic and enslaving power in the world.

Jesus' message for us today is that the world is still enslaved by the power of sin. It is all around us: systems we have inherited that protect some but not all, systems that protect the interests of some but not all of humanity. We have inherited a broken world with broken promises and systems. Jesus proclaims the good news about a kingdom that casts out sin, casts out demons, and transforms the human heart. True transformation begins in our hearts when we daily let Christ reign in our lives over all the other powers and kingdoms of the world.

In Matthew, chapter 25, we are given a vision of the finality of Jesus' kingdom when all the nations and kingdoms of the world will be gathered before Jesus the king, and he will separate them from one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. To those at his right hand, he will say, "*Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.*"

Paul reminds us in the Letter to the Philippians (3:20), "*But our citizenship is in heaven.*" Citizenship in Jesus' kingdom defines us. Jesus and his kingdom should be our social conscience. We have the power to use our voices, our hands, our wealth, our gifts, our very lives for others – for "the least of these." We have the power to reshape the world so that all people will be treated as children of God. God loves the world, and God calls us to do the same for the sake of "the least of these." When we get to heaven, it will not matter what passport we carried in this world. The only thing that will matter is if we belonged to Jesus' kingdom of the good news. The only thing that will matter is if we proclaimed the good news of the kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. Proclaim the good news. It is the gateway to the kingdom of heaven. Amen.