



SAINT LUKE'S

“RECEIVING THE KINGDOM”
PROPER 14C

GENESIS 15:1-6
PSALM 33
HEBREWS 11:1-3, 8-16
LUKE 12:32-40

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY
AUGUST 11, 2019

Dealing with the unexpected is part of life. Jesus offers us several images of God's activity in today's gospel and each of them defy human prediction. The Son of Man (his favorite title for himself) will come like a thief. The owner of the house will return unexpectedly. God has a pattern of breaking in to the world in unexpected ways, for which humanity is unprepared. God breaks in unexpectedly through a peasant family in Galilee in the occupied Roman Empire. In Jesus who comes even now disguised in refugees and children and foreigners and the sick.

The unexpected is hard for us. We are planners. Sometimes the unexpected is great news, but usually we prepare for the worst for good reason. We think of victims of gun violence, shot down in the middle of their daily life on an ordinary day. A terrible storm wipes out whole towns. A deadly disease decimates a country. In human experience, the unexpected is often fearful.

Last week we heard Jesus' parable about the man who dies suddenly, midway through building bigger barns for all his crops. Fr. Reynolds spoke of the temptation to orient our lives around whatever we identify as the "golden ticket" - our best bet for security and comfort.

We probably treasure some earthly things and most likely we treasure some spiritual “things” too: music, art, relationships, our health, our freedom, beauty, love. These are not things that rust and moth consume so much as time, decay and mortality overtake us. What does Jesus say about coping faithfully with the uncertainties of life?

Jesus teaches us about coping with the unexpected in an unexpected way! In between the bigger barns reading from last week, and this week’s gospel, is the famous lilies of the field passage with its advice: “do not worry about what you are to eat or to drink or to wear.” Luke and Matthew both conclude: seek first the kingdom of God and all these other things will be given to you as well. But then, we hear today that we don’t even have to seek for God’s kingdom. Only in Luke Jesus says: *Do not be afraid little flock, for it is your father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.* In this world where everything has to be earned, we are rarely just given anything meaningful for free. Yet... *Do not be afraid – it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.* It is (not will be, is) God’s good pleasure - God’s delight - to give us as pure grace, everything that matters most.

The challenge is not to go find, protect, build barns and security fences. The challenge is not to pray away our worrying. Or even to search high and low for God's Kingdom. The challenge – or invitation - is to receive the kingdom that God is giving us. What on earth does that mean?

What is this gifted kingdom?

How do we receive it?

How do we live in it?

Living in God's kingdom is being fully awake in – alert, present, inhabiting - this moment now.

Opening our eyes to this moment right now. It is God's gift to us. Now is always the place to start in the spiritual life, not tomorrow, not yesterday. Now. Living in God's kingdom stirs gratitude first which primes us to receive God's grace. We remember that today's opening Collect asks for God's Spirit to guide our thinking and recognizes that we cannot even exist without God. Our lives are a gift from God. It is not our "right" to exist. It is all a gift. All we are and have is ours on loan, in trust, in stewardship. It is humbling that we are always in a posture of receiving from God. That itself is spiritually challenging for us

¹ *Dom John Chapman O.S.B. (1865-1933)*

if we are planners, doers, creators, givers everywhere else in our lives.

The kingdom of God is life itself. It is not only the next life. It is the life we know and the life we don't know yet ("heaven" in shorthand) because it is too big for us to understand. But we will know more when we enter the next life. The kingdom of God includes the life we had before we were born and the life we will have after we die. Jesus isn't the only one who has pre-incarnate life with God before he is born and after he dies. All of us have life with God *before* as well as after this earthly chapter. Jesus comes in part so that we might understand the life we live more fully. It is God's good pleasure to share freely with us the fullness of life as much as we can possibly receive.

The Kingdom of God is everything that was, is or will be. That is God's realm, God's universe. There is nothing that exists that is *not* strictly speaking God's realm or within God's providence, since God is the Creator. There is nothing that God cannot act upon if God so chooses. There are forces that fight *against* God's Kingdom and we know all too well what they are. We see the poison fruits of selfishness and greed, hatred and fear in the daily news. God doesn't violate

human freewill, but in faith we believe that only what is of God's kingdom is eternal.

We live in and spread God's kingdom by choosing attitudes and actions that support God's dream for all people and all creation. The Christian life can be described as receiving God's kingdom, living in this fullness of life day by day, and sharing it in word, deed and prayer day by day.

This is a profound and beautiful teaching of Jesus in Luke: *Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.* May we day by day open our souls and hearts and hands and minds to receive and share God's joy and delight in humanity.

AMEN

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