

Jesus and The Kingdom of Love

Pentecost 3, Proper 6 Year B

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Grace Episcopal Church, Goochland, Virginia

The Rev. Dr. Mario Gonzalez del Solar

Ezekiel 17:22-24 (NRSV)

Thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar; I will set it out. I will break off a tender one from the topmost of its young twigs; I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. ²³ On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it, in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar. Under it every kind of bird will live; in the shade of its branches will nest winged creatures of every kind. ²⁴ All the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD. I bring low the high tree, I make high the low tree; I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I the LORD have spoken; I will accomplish it.

2 Corinthians 5:6-17 (NRSV)

So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord— ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰ For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil. ¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. ¹² We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. ¹³ For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴ For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. ¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

Mark 4:26-34 (NRSV)

[Jesus] said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷ and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. ²⁸ The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.” ³⁰ He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” ³³ With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; ³⁴ he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

In our gospel reading this morning, Jesus tells two familiar parables. They are two different ways of presenting the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is Jesus’ primary topic of teaching in the gospels. Kings and kingdoms don’t mean much to us today—unless it’s Tire Kingdom or the Magic Kingdom or Burger King. Probably the oldest image we have of kingdoms might have to do with the Middle Ages. But in the ancient world, kingdoms were really the only form of government there was. A king—or emperor, or pharaoh, whatever—ran everything in the land. Period. So when Jesus teaches about the Kingdom of God, he’s talking about a spiritual realm where God is king and his will is perfectly accomplished in every corner of reality.

The Kingdom of God is presented throughout the Bible. Our first reading from Ezekiel 17 is another parable about the kingdom of God. The sprig the Lord will plant is the Messiah, Jesus. The sprig will grow into a “**noble cedar**” which is the Kingdom of God, filled with peoples from all over the earth, the “**winged creatures of every kind.**”

The Kingdom will come in its fullness at the end of time, when Jesus the Messiah returns. All that is wrong in this world will be set right. There will be no more sin, or sickness, or death, or injustice. No more disorders in the natural world. He will bring with him unlimited love, life, and joy for his people. We don’t know the exact nature of the completed Kingdom, but we do know that we will be transformed to be like Christ—the living and the dead. It’s something more glorious than we can possibly imagine.

The Kingdom of God is a future reality, but Jesus brought it into the present circumstances of this world. He is the king at the center of God’s kingdom. That’s why everywhere he went, you could see the Kingdom breaking in: sick people were made instantly well; dead people were brought back to life, sinners were forgiven, storms were instantly stopped.

At the center of the Kingdom is the King of Love, Almighty God, and his Son, Jesus. Out of his great love he has created the stupendous beauty of this universe and given it to us to live in. You may have seen the astonishing images taken through the Hubble telescope: titanic clouds of millions of stars in deepest space that can hold thousands of our solar system.

This same God and King loves us so much that when we strayed from his Kingdom and went our own way, he sent his Son into the world we had made dark and painful to take on himself the darkness of our sin and the pain and grief it causes through death. As John says in his first letter, **“In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”** (1 John 4:10) God’s cosmic love at the center of his Kingdom is what is behind all our life and ministry in Christ. As Paul tells the Corinthian Christians this morning, **“the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.”** (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

In Jesus, God has come into this world to die for our sins and take us into his own life and perfection for eternity. So what should we do? People asked Jesus this very question. In John 6:28 the crowd asks him, **“What must we do to perform the works of God?”** Jesus answered them, **“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”** (John 6:28-29)

Trust in Jesus for everything. He is the King of love. Proclaim his truth with boldness. Administer his justice with compassion. When we do these things God makes the Kingdom present in the lives of our family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and fellow students. The Kingdom is present where God’s will is done. It will overtake and overwhelm all things when Christ returns.

Christ has died to forgive our sins and bring us into his Kingdom of love.

Christ has risen to impart to us his eternal life of his Kingdom of love.

Christ will come again to establish his Kingdom of love in its fullness.

Amen.