

Kingdom Ways in Anxious Times

Matthew 21:1-11 & Psalm 23

Palm Sunday
April 5, 2020

Pandemic Living

- My pandemic life – marked by:
 - Swift transitions, new rhythms, mild respiratory symptoms & anxiety
 - My expectations for productivity have grown!
- How we relate to nearly everything has changed – work, home, family, friends, neighbours, shopkeepers
- Many and quick adjustments being made
- Bombarded with information
- Overwhelmed, less productive, shallow engagement with God

→ What is the Christian way, the Kingdom way, for anxious minds in anxious times?

Ways of the Kingdom

In anxious times, we look to that which is long-loved and long-trusted:

1. Psalm 23
2. The Palm Sunday Story
 - Upside-down Kingdom of God – the Saviour of the world walks towards his own death on a humble donkey
3. The Hospitality of God

God our Provider

The Lord is my Shepherd (v1a)

- Shepherds are everything to their sheep!
- When we declare that God is our Shepherd, we declare that God is everything in our lives
- Jesus: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” John 10:11

I lack nothing / I shall not want (v1b)

- Not a lack of desire, it's about not lacking what we *need*
- Trusting in the shepherd is to know that, in the end, we will be given that which the Shepherd knows we need.

God our Provider

Hard promise to hold onto right now!

- How in pandemic times can we trust God to provide?
- Needs are many!

NT Wright article: “Christianity has no answers about coronavirus. It’s not meant to.”

- “Lament is what happens when people ask, ‘Why?’ and don’t get an answer. It’s where we get to when we move beyond our self-centered worry about our sins and failings and look more broadly at the suffering of the world.”
- “The point of lament, woven thus into the fabric of the biblical tradition, is not just that it’s an outlet for our frustration, sorrow, loneliness and sheer inability to understand what is happening or why. The mystery of the biblical story is that *God also laments*.”

→ He is present with us in our sorrow.

God's Presence in the Valley

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death/the darkest valley..." (v4a)

- This is the reality we live in now
 - COVID-19 isn't the worst thing, but it certainly represents "the shadow of death"
- Even in the valley, God makes another promise: He is with us in the darkness.
 - He is present.
 - He is lamenting with us.

Our Christian Ethic

- Unless we are frontline workers, our Christian faith invites us to support the most vulnerable with resources, love, primitive precautionary measures, such as:
 - Staying home
 - Isolating
 - Learning to make masks
 - Learning to wear masks
 - Learning new technology
 - Cautiously venturing out to help the vulnerable acquire essentials
- Not comfortable, not fancy, but perhaps these are the ways of the upside-down Kingdom of God

Our Christian Ethic

Your rod and staff, they comfort me... (v4c)

- Primitive disciplinary tools to guide and move sheep along correctly
- Not comfortable when used on the sheep!
- The *use* of the tools wasn't comfortable; comfort is in having someone who cares enough to use them

Bruce Hindmarsh article: *"Coronavirus & the Communion of Saints"*

- "Christian instinct to care for those who suffer from communicable disease and all its devastating physical, social, and economic consequences runs deep in the history of the church."
- Today, our Christian instinct and ethic is the same, but our actions are different... almost the complete opposite.

Hospitality

Prepare a table before me... Anoint my head... my cup overflows. (v5)

- God is the ultimate host
 - When we can't share a meal, what does a broader hospitality look like?
 - Time, listening ear, donations, online presence, gifts, shared resources
 - Here again, we recall that we follow an unorthodox God – a Shepherd-God who entered Jerusalem on a lowly donkey.
- What would he do? How would he offer radical hospitality in a time of COVID-19?

Hospitality

Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (v6)

- Derek Kidner: "With God these qualities are not merely solid and dependable, they are vigorous – for *to follow* does not mean to bring up the rear, but to pursue!"
- Encouragement here to look for that goodness which pursues us
 - The people of God show up to serve and worship together, healthcare workers fight on the frontlines of illness, neighbours help neighbours, relationships are rekindled, repaired or strengthened.
 - Example: palm fronds
 - The palms paved the way for an exchange of hospitality and grace.

→ How are you seeing goodness, mercy, grace, love in this anxious time?

Kingdom Ways for Anxious Times

Two-fold way of kingdom living in anxious times:

1. Declare, despite fear and doubt, that the Lord is our Shepherd whether we are beside quiet waters or in the shadow of death.
 2. Follow, despite the discomfort, our Shepherd-God into the uncomfortable unknown while finding creative expressions of hospitality.
-
- Set the table. Eat together. In person and online.
 - Follow the monastics: Stay home in order to fully engage the needs of the world.
 - Trust that is God is present, lament with God in prayer.