

July 19, 2020 Sermon notes - 7th Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 28:10-19a, Psalm 139:1-11,22-23, Romans 8:12-25, Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

In one of the most famous speeches in the past century Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. uttered those well known words, “I have a dream today”. Dr. King was speaking about a vision of a different world - a world in which human rights were respected by everyone and a world in which peace and justice flourished. Some of us have caught glimpses of that possible world and it has changed our lives. It changed the life of Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, for he also had a dream and he too caught a glimpse of a world in which God brought healing and peace into this world. In his vision he saw a ladder reaching up into heaven with God’s messengers travelling up and down the ladder. Jacob concluded that the spot on which he was sleeping was a special and holy place and so he named it “Bethel” - the house of God. Centuries later, when Jesus walked among the people of ancient Palestine, he brought a message of that same dream and in his actions the dream was brought into reality. The kingdom of heaven - that place of perfect peace and complete justice - was breaking into this world. This, Jesus proclaimed, was in fulfilment of God’s promise that one day Creation would be remade and God’s presence would fill all the earth. It is for this reason that the disciples of Jesus are instructed to pray using the pattern prayer Jesus taught his disciples which includes the phrase “thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”. There is in the heart of God’s family a yearning for the day when the will of God is done on earth in the same way that it is done in heaven - perfectly. In our world it is clear that God does not receive perfect obedience from the people He created but we are promised a day when that will indeed be the state of affairs - God’s will being done on earth in the same way that it is done in heaven - and so we are encouraged to pray for that day to come. This portion of the prayer we know as the Lord’s prayer is a statement of faith and hope inspired by the faithfulness of God who has promised a future of true justice, beauty, and love. This too is a glimpse into a different kind of world.

In the section of Matthew’s account of the Good News of Jesus Christ which is featured in these weeks we are shown how Jesus used parables to try to explain and point to this future promise. This future for which, as St. Paul says, all Creation groans in anticipation. It is also a future that breaks in upon our lives with a glimpse of its promise such as the times when health was restored or people were fed in a miraculous way. Followers of Jesus Christ are members of the family of God who are given this first glimpse of heaven on earth and Jesus used parables to speak about it.

“The kingdom of heaven”, Jesus said, “is like a man who has sowed good seed in his field”. As he explained later to his disciples ‘the field is the world, and the good seed stands for the children of the kingdom.’ The reality of the kingdom of heaven is being planted into the world by the Son of Man. That future which will one day be seen throughout the earth is planted in seed form in a field called the world. Good seed produces good fruit and so it is with the seed of the kingdom of God. The problem is that

this world is not yet completely transformed and, as the parable illustrates, an enemy of God plants weeds among the good seed. Don't we find that to be the case - that the goodness of life is mingled within that which is not good. Sometimes that means the evil needs to remain in the field and await the harvest time when the good and evil can safely be separated. This reality is not an easy one to face given that the weeds use up resources the wheat requires and they may also block out the sun. Yet Jesus told his disciples this parable to explain something about the kingdom of heaven. When it enters this world during this interim period there will be a mingling but when all is complete and it is time for the harvest only the 'wheat' will be destined for use in the kingdom while the weeds are burned and cast away. The dream of God's kingdom and will being done on earth as it is in heaven is occasionally evident in our lives but the fullness of the dream awaits another day. In the meantime we are to avoid damaging the wheat.

I, for one, wish this mingling of evil was not so because it means that I need to accept the fact that cruelty and hatred will continue to affect my life and there is little I can do about it. Jesus knew this to be true as well. The Prince of Peace lived within the Roman Empire for approximately 30 years and the Roman Empire was not a shining example of the Kingdom of heaven. Jesus had come to announce that the kingdom of heaven had come near and yet the earthly kingdom into which that message was being delivered was among the cruelest. He was well aware of the difficulty into which he was sending his disciples and so encouraged them by telling them that the weeds do not overcome the wheat. Evil does exist - we hear stories about it every day - but goodness and love will outlast it all. If we have received the gift of God's Holy Spirit we have the kingdom of heaven in our lives and nothing will overcome that. We will need to live with the reality of evil in our midst until all is fulfilled but we need not fear being lost.

Saint Paul had some idea of this as well. In his letter to the Romans he urged them to 'hang in there' to put in our modern jargon. "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18) With the dream of the kingdom of heaven firmly fixed in his mind St. Paul faced the difficulties that came his way with hope and he encouraged his readers to do the same. There will come a day, he said, when the resurrection of all things will take place. Jesus is the first fruit of that promised resurrection and through his life and love we share in the promise that was visible in him. 'The glory about to be revealed to us' will include this wonder - the wonder of the kingdom of heaven on earth and the family of God raised to eternal life in that kingdom where God's presence will fill all of creation. The created order awaits that day every bit as much as we do and it too rejoices at the signs of this new life as it comes among us from time to time. The dream of this new life is based on the promises of God and is seen in its fullness in the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth. This dream will one day come into fullness but in the meantime we live in hope.

As St. Paul reminded us, “For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” (8:25)

As we continue to dream of that world where God’s will is done perfectly let us rejoice over the times when we catch glimpses of it amidst the cruelty and evil that also exists. The wonder of love and the healing of body, soul, and spirit are works that come from heaven and we see them around us if we open our eyes. This dream is not a figment of our imagination. Jesus was raised to life and sits in authority over all creation and has promised to bring this reality into fullness. We are asked to trust in the one who has brought this dream into our reality that he will bring it to completion and give us the strength to persevere. Perhaps we need to spend some time looking for the signs of the kingdom of heaven in our midst rather than being overwhelmed by stories of evil and cruelty. Let us remember what St. Paul said to the Christians in Corinth. “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we shall see face to face. Now I know only in part, then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” (1 Cor. 13:12,13)