

January 23 2011 Sermon

Intro paragraph

Christ came, comes and is coming to reclaim his kingdom for himself. He came as a man, suffered and died and rose again to earn our salvation. He comes to us now in Word and the Sacraments. And he will come again to end all sin and evil in the world. That day will be the final judgment of all the world. On that day all sin will be ended, all evil done away. God's kingdom will be fully established and there will be no more suffering, injustice, or wrong. As we struggle and suffer through this life, that day is our hope and promise that we will be completely whole. All tears will be wiped away. Our suffering will end, and all sin gone from our lives.

Matthew 4:12-25

17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (has come near)."

23 And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The message of Jesus is repent. Turn away from your sin. Reject it, deny it. Run from it. Rid your life of it. Why? Because the kingdom of heaven has come near.

The creation had been taken captive by Satan. It was broken. Death reigned. Darkness ruled. Mankind was taken prisoner by sin.

But Jesus came to take the world back and set things right. When Jesus came, the kingdom came. When Jesus died his kingdom was founded. Jesus was proclaimed King on the cross. Jesus died so that his people would be raised to life. Jesus came so that his light would shine in the darkness. Jesus is the light that those living in darkness saw, as our Old Testament reading declares. Jesus came to take back his kingdom from Satan and sin and death. Jesus has come to restore justice. Jesus comes to make right all that is wrong. Jesus comes to take over the world and your life.

That is the message that Jesus preached. Repent, the kingdom has come near. Jesus is taking over. He is taking over your life.

But is that good news or bad news?

If you are a good Christian and faithful follower of Christ, if you are satisfied with the way you are; if you're happy with the kind of person you are; if you are a loving person and have always helped

those in need, the poor, the homeless, then this is BAD news! Because the last thing you want is for Jesus to take over your good life and take control away from you.

On the other hand, if your life is filled with temptation and sin; if you just aren't a really great person; if you're just not a very good Christian and not following Christ the way you should, if you don't love your neighbor very much and have not helped those in need then this is GREAT news!

Whoa...Wait a minute! Isn't that backwards? Well, let's take a look at the parable Jesus told about the Pharisee and publican praying in the temple. The Pharisee was a good person, a religious person. The Pharisee was a good disciple. But he went home unforgiven. Jesus was not impressed with his goodness. Jesus was not impressed with his religious duty, his prayers or his fasting.

On the other hand, the publican, the sinner, was not a good, religious man. He was a lousy disciple, a poor church member. But he went home justified.

You see, if you are comfortable with the kind of person you are; if you are happy with your faith in God and know that you are a good Christian, then you are self-righteous, filled with pride, one whom God threatens to spew out of his mouth. "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." So, if you are comfortable with the way your life is; if you are satisfied with yourself, if you are happy with your faith and the way you are serving God, if you are satisfied with the status quo, then watch out. Because when Jesus takes over, everything will change. You don't want Jesus to take over because then you won't be in charge. Your goodness, your efforts, your holiness, your good works aren't worth a thing. The light that shines from your holy life appears as a black cloud against the background of the light of Jesus. All your good deeds will be like filthy rags. All your religious holiness will be seen as mere hypocrisy. You are not nearly as good as you think you are. Jesus is a threat, a judge, an enemy.

On the other hand, if you are unhappy with yourself and struggle with your humanity; if you have messed up your life, made wrong decisions and wrong choices; if you are not a good disciple of Jesus and are a failure at following him, then it is good news, because Jesus is about to change all that. If you look down the road and see that the future is nothing but pain and suffering; if all you see in your future is illness, weakness, old age, being forced to move into assisted living and from assisted living into a nursing home, then Jesus coming to take over is good news. If you find temptation and sin controlling your life; if drugs or alcohol are running your life and altering your personality; if your heart is filled with worry and anxiety; if anger often takes control of your thoughts and words, if you yearn to be holy as God is holy, then it is good news because Jesus is coming to wipe away the sin and brokenness and restore you to wholeness of both body and soul. Jesus is coming to change your sinful heart, to rid your life of sin, to fix all that is broken.

Repent means to come to terms with your wayward ways as a fallen human being. Accept your humanity as wholesome but broken, because you are accepted by God. In Jesus coming to take over your broken life you will find the love of God, because He is coming to take over your life and fix what is broken. Jesus comes to restore your humanity, not once, not twice, but daily. He became human so that you could become divine. He brings healing and restoration to you. Jesus is coming to establish his kingdom in you and rule as your King.

Having Jesus as your King means that you let him take over control of all areas of your life. Ancient society was divided into four parts: the market place, the gymnasium, the coliseum and the temple. But in all these places, religion penetrated. The gods were erected in the sports arena, the market and the entertainment centers. No one would go into any of these arenas of life without prayer and offerings to the gods. But in today's world, entertainment, sports and the shopping mall are completely empty of religion. We live and move around in these areas without any thought of God or Jesus. We go about our business in these areas as if we didn't know Jesus and didn't care how he wants us to live. But when Jesus is King in your life, you will do all things according to his will. His commandments will direct your affairs. His love will be seen in your life. You will love and serve your neighbor in all these arenas of life. That is what it means that Jesus is coming to take over.

And this takeover of your life is in three parts: past, present and future. Jesus transcends all time. In Jesus the past, the present, and the future all come together. In the past Jesus was made man, born of a virgin, suffered, died and was buried. He accepted your humanity. He clothed himself in your sinful, human nature. He covered himself in your sins. He suffered all your injustice; your hatred; your scorn; your rejection. He humbled himself on account of your pride. He became your servant. He went to the cross and paid for your cruelty. He laid down his life for you, and shed his blood to wash you from all your sin. To put to rights all that you made wrong. To reconcile all those whom you have offended. To make up for all your failures. To recompense your wrongs. To pay your debts.

And on the third he rose from the dead to give you life. His resurrection is God proclaiming forgiveness. His empty tomb is your guarantee of eternal life. His resurrection is the seal of God's irrevocable promise to raise you from the dead on the last day.

Then Jesus ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of God the Father almighty. There in the present He sits on the throne to rule his kingdom. In the present He rules in all who believe and are baptized. He comes to you through the promise of his word.

In Baptism his word is joined to water and as that water is poured over you, he washes you from your sin and pours the Holy Spirit into you. In Baptism he claimed you as his own. You are now God's property. Your Baptism is God's promise that all that is wrong with your life; all that you have messed up; all you have done wrong in the past is forgiven and Jesus will straighten it out. Your life is not so wrong that Jesus cannot make it right. Your life is not so trashed that Jesus cannot restore it to wholeness. So if you yearn to be holy; if you long to be a better Christian disciple; if you wish to be rid of sinful and evil thoughts and actions; if your personality needs a make-over; if you are a slave to drugs or alcohol, then Jesus coming in your Baptism is the promise of a new and restored life. It is a new beginning for you.

In the liturgy of the divine service you get that new beginning every week. You receive forgiveness as you eat the body and drink the blood of Jesus in holy communion. He enters into you to take over; to be your King, to take charge. And each and every week as you sin over and over you come back here to renew His rule in you and to re-bond yourself to Jesus. In the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, where do you think the publican was the following week? He was right back in church

asking for forgiveness all over again; right where you should be every week. Why? Because his human, sinful flesh was still with him, but he knew that every time he entered into the temple to worship God, he would be forgiven and restored anew. So too, you come every week to be restored, renewed, forgiven again in the divine service through word and sacrament. For it is here, in the means of grace, that Jesus is to be found; it is here that he comes into you to establish his kingdom in your heart.

He also will come in the future. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. He is coming to put an end to all evil and pain and suffering. All sin will be judged and all sinners cast out. The effects and destruction sin has wrought in the world will be reversed and all will be restored. If you yearn to be holy as God is holy, then put your hope in this, that he is coming to make a final end of all evil and sin. When he comes he will completely rid you of all sin. Jesus will bring his kingdom to full completion. You will then be holy and perfect. No longer will you sin. His kingdom will be fully established. He will rule. All creation will be restored to its original perfection; you will be sinless; your suffering and pain will end; your poverty and hunger will end; you will no longer be lonely; your tears will all be wiped away. Your sickness will be healed, your body restored to complete perfection. If all you have to look forward to is sickness and old age, then look a little further to Jesus' coming again. All that will soon be done. It will be over.

On that day, all sin will be judged and cast out. All suffering and pain will be destroyed. All that is wrong will be righted. And those found to have faith in Christ will be free from all that is wrong in your lives and in the world.

Amen.