

February 21st, 2021

Genesis 9: 8-17; Psalm 25: 1-10; 1 Peter 3: 18-22; Mark 1: 9-15

Lent 1, b.

After Jesus is baptized, he walks into the wilderness where he is tempted and is cared for by the angels while in his agony.

Jesus walks out of the wilderness, having been baptized and tempted, but now, as the gospel says, begins to proclaim the good news of God, that is, --that the Kingdom of God has come near; the Kingdom of God is at hand, in other words, the Kingdom of God is beginning to bring in a new beginning.

Yet, ever since this gospel was written and disseminated, there has been debated as to just *what is* "The Kingdom of God;" *what is* this new beginning that was brought by the Holy Spirit at the baptism of Jesus? Specifically, at the time of Jesus' baptism, The Kingdom of God was a contrast between the rule or dominion of God versus the rule or dominion of Rome. However, in this day and age, the easiest answer to this debate is given by The Lutheran Study Bible: "*The Kingdom of God is a way to talk about God's presence in the world.*"

So, what does that mean, "God's presence in the world"? Over the last 2000 years, the meaning of "The Kingdom of God is at hand" or

“God’s presence in the world” has gone through several definitions and debates. During the Middle Ages, which spanned from the 6th century into the 16th century, over a thousand years, The Kingdom of God was the Church, organized religion. And those of you who know history, it is fascinating, and tragic to read how the church actually owned and ruled the citizens, through the belief of the church as well as the belief of the people that *the church*, was The Kingdom of God here on this earth.

That belief faded in the 16th century, and of course that was the century of Martin Luther and Reform. The Kingdom of God here on our earth, started taking on a more people-oriented form rather than church-oriented. It was believed at this time during the reformation that The Kingdom of God was a world, kingdom that was active in ridding the world of oppression and attending to people’s needs rather than a kingdom ruling and controlling people. And this belief of caring for the oppressed has held on in one form or another since then.

However, there have been other proposals of just what is and where is the Kingdom of God on this earth. The theologian, C.H.Dodd proposed that the Kingdom of God was already present, but selectively –that is, where ever God’s rule was established, there was the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God was in so-called Christian nations that use

Christian values in their governing. If a nation was not Christian, then the Kingdom of God did not exist there, it was believed.

Then a movement, called the Emerging Church, proposed that the Kingdom of God was here and now as God's people renewed their lives around God's mission of love and justice in the world, addressing ecological, moral, economic and social issues. In fact, this movement has been criticized, rightly or wrongly, as moving away from the concept of a theological Kingdom of God to a stronger concept of social services Kingdom of God.

Finally, currently, there is a belief held by some, that the presence of evil is so pervasive that the Kingdom of God only is brought about through divine intervention and that is when heaven will eventually come to earth. This thought strongly hints of course to the Second Coming.

It is not surprising that theologians have theorized about these three words spoken by Jesus, soon after he was baptized. Similarly, when we attend Sunday School and Bible Study, do we leave, with answers or more questions?

So, where do you and I stand in our understanding of *what is* "The Kingdom of God?" --Perhaps, the real question, however, is not, "What is the Kingdom of God", but "How do we live within the Kingdom of

God?” I and you, we are here for a reason and the basis of that reason is that we were chosen by God to be here, to live in God’s Kingdom, regardless of its definition. We are not here by chance. God has chosen us to be a part, a living part of God’s Kingdom. So, regardless of what God’s kingdom is like, God’s Kingdom is here, although right now, in imperfect form. We do know that God’s kingdom is not housed in one church or only focused on the oppressed. God’s kingdom is here, with us through God’s Holy Spirit, breathed into Jesus at His baptism and many believe, breathed into us with our first breath, as well as coming into us in our baptism.

So, what is it, that God has chosen for you and for me to be, within God’s Kingdom? It’s here, and you and I are here in it –and it is within us. So, where do we go with that? More importantly, how do we live with that? How do we live within and through the Spirit in the Kingdom of God?

When we are told to pray without ceasing, that is our prayer, “Spirit of the Living God, be with me; lead me, direct me, and guide me to live within your Kingdom.”

Amen,

Pastor Scales