

Proper 9-a
Zechariah 9:9-12
Psalm 145: 8-15
Romans 7:15-25a
Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

One of the recurrent phrases in the Bible is “the Kingdom of God” in its many variations. The Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament, uses the phrase “your kingdom” in many places – including our psalm today. One of the Zondervan Biblical Encyclopedias says that the word “kingdom” shows up 55 times in Matthew, 20 times in Mark, 46 times in Luke’s gospel and five times in John’s. That’s a lot of kingdoms!

But here’s the strange thing. Jesus never defines what he means by “kingdom of God” or “kingdom of heaven.” We kind of intuitively know what he’s talking about. Scholars certainly don’t share that sense. There are shelves and shelves of books and articles that try to unpack just what the Kingdom of God is!

Zechariah says that our king will come mounted on a young donkey, in peace, humbly and powerfully. This king will stop the war horses, chariots and battle bows. He will bring peace, and his dominion will cover the known world. Our psalm tells us that this kingdom will be glorious and splendid; it will endure through all ages.

It sounds great, doesn't it? Sounds like the cure for our perilous and challenging times. But Jesus got himself in big trouble talking about the Kingdom in Roman Jerusalem. It was finally the issue on which Pilate agreed to his crucifixion.

Jesus was very clear about his relationship with God and God's Kingdom. He came to reestablish the Kingdom of God on earth, both instrumentally himself, and by beginning a process that would result in the permanent establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. In the Gospel today, Jesus meditates on his ability to bring people to his Father through his relationship as son. And in the special prayer he gave us, he invokes God's kingdom: *Thy kingdom come*. He uses the exact same word each time – so it's not just a translation issue.

What's more, he promises us a New Covenant, a new way of relating to God the Father, through him. That's what baptism is about. That's what we will be doing at the 10:30 service this morning. We'll be baptizing a new member into God's household, God's dominion and Kingdom. We'll be changing the relationship of young Willow to God through Jesus, for the rest of her life, and beyond.

But what IS the Kingdom of God? Did Jesus take his vision of this Kingdom with him when he left us? Nope – as our Messiah, he changed our

relationship with God forever. And perhaps it is that relationship itself that is our key to understanding. Perhaps Jesus was trying to get us to see that the way we think about our relationship to God is more important than the physical existence of such a Kingdom. Our right relationship to God's creation is what marks us as God's beloved children and members of God's household.

When Newton demonstrated that clear light contains all the colors of the rainbow, he changed our understanding of light forever. When Einstein suggested that we could understand light as both waves and particles in quantum relationship, he changed our understanding of light forever. When Jesus died on the cross for us, as Messiah and Savior, he changed our relationship with God forever.

It is this relationship that is central to Christianity. We no longer have to carry the burden of sin and guilt amassed by humans. We can give that burden to Jesus. We no longer think we have to scapegoat and sacrifice humans or animals to appease a vengeful God. Jesus has assured us that God is love, and the household of God is a place of compassion.

As some of you know, when I get stumped about a concept, I often turn to the Catechism in the back of our Prayer Book for insights. On the top of page 851, there is the question: *What did the Messiah promise in the*

New Covenant? The answer is: Christ promised to bring us into the kingdom of God and give us life in all its fullness.

So the world may not look any different inside or outside the church if you are not a Christian. But the way you see the world and the way you see your relationship with God has changed after you are baptized. Jesus tells us that the world's burdens are heavy – especially if we think we have to bear them alone. But we are not alone, and can never be after we have been “marked as Christ's own forever.”

How easily we can forget that Jesus has promised to be with us, and he does not fail. We may turn away from him, forget him and deny him. But he always watches us, remembers us and acknowledges us. That is why we have churches. So that we may be with each other, and help each other, in his name.

We are just starting our Rummage season here at St. Paul's Church. It is a complex and large ministry that we undertake each year so that we can give away nearly all the proceeds. And it is based on a simple principle of sharing. We give what we no longer need, or have too much of. We physically bring what we share, and our volunteers physically sort and mark and price it all through summer's heat. Then others advertise and conduct

the sale, as a sort of harvest in September, so that we have money to help those in need through the long winter.

We do this ministry as part of this church, this gathering of people who wish to act in ways that help and heal our world. We do it as a symbol of our relationship to God through Jesus. That rummage stuff is more than the junk in our garages and closets. It is a tangible demonstration of our desire for our world to be a better place.

That Prayer Book Catechism also says on page 858, that the mission of the church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. We're trying. One baptism at a time, one Eucharist at a time, one package of food at a time, one carload of stuff at a time, we're trying.

Jesus loves what we do in his name. This is what his yoke looks like, and when we do it together, we find that it is light and easy.

The world has not changed – but we have.

Amen