

Beachburg Pastoral Charge

Worship Service April 25th, 2021

Greetings

Good Morning. Well it is certainly hard for me to believe that this is the last Sunday in April and it seems, that at least here in the Upper Ottawa valley that the old adage that “April showers bring May flowers” may not be holding up this year, as we sure could use a bit of rain.

When I see the hard-working farmers out tilling the field and a cloud of dust behind the tractor, I can only hope it’s not an omen of what to expect this summer as the fields could sure use a good soaking. Even today’s forecast of rain seems to have petered out. But at least we did dodge the snow bullet this past week so I guess as we learned last Sunday there is always at least two ways to look at things.

Call To Worship

So this past Thursday as we recognized earth day I realized that God is the Life Presence at the heart of all creation. So let us come to seek the light of divine love. Like the early morning sunlight that shines through our window, that love is reflected to us through the Spirit.

We open ourselves to see and hear, and feel God’s divine energy. To sense once more of the spark that energizes our heart, that motivates our thinking and lifts our hopeful spirit. Come let us worship God.

Gathering Prayer

God we’ve gathered together in your presence to offer our praise and our prayers for this your beloved world. We come before you with confidence, knowing that even when we can’t find the words, your own Spirit is right here with us, praying in us and for us, giving shape to our wordless hopes and longings, and pleading for us before the throne of grace. So, we come this morning with joy, to offer our worship to you O God knowing that you love each one of us. In Jesus name we pray.

Song - Our opening number comes from the Band “Rend Collective” with a song entitled “Build Your Kingdom Here”
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbdJXKqVgtg>)

Scripture

Acts 9:10-18 - Saul's Conversion on the road to Damascus

¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”

“Yes, Lord,” he answered.

¹¹ The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”

¹³ “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized,

John 9:1-12 - Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

⁹ As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

³ “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

⁶ After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. ⁷ “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

⁸ His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some claimed that he was.

Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man."

¹⁰ "How then were your eyes opened?" they asked.

¹¹ He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."

¹² "Where is this man?" they asked him.

"I don't know," he said.

Meditation - Searching The Mind Of Jesus On Kingdom

The other night I was watching one of the movies nominated for tonight's Oscar awards. The movie "Sound Of Metal" is the story of Ruben, a drummer in a heavy metal band who becomes deaf. In learning "how" to be deaf his mentor Joe asks Ruben to sit quietly alone in the study in the hope that he will ultimately become comfortable in the silence. But it is the question that the Joe asks that fueled today's sermon. Joe asks "All these mornings when you have been sitting in my study, have you had any moments of stillness? Cause you're right Ruben. The world does keep moving and can be dam cruel place, but for me those moments of stillness – that place – that's the Kingdom of God and that place will never abandon you."

This got me thinking. What is the Kingdom? Where is it? Who gets to be in it? How do you and I find it? One of my jobs is to try and relate how Jesus viewed such concepts. And I think the one text that seems to fully encapsulate Jesus thought on the subject of the kingdom of God is found at the beginning of Mark's Gospel.

The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe the Good News. Jesus' way of describing the Kingdom of God is when we live into a good news state of mind.

There are about 150 references to Kingdom in the New Testament including the phrase Kingdom Of Heaven which Matthew uses. Jesus always used "like" stories (similes for you English buffs) to describe what it means. The Kingdom, it is like a farmer sowing seed. Like a fisherman with his net. Like a treasure hidden in a field. Like a son who is lost. Like bread that rises and light that shines and salt that preserves.

We know that Jesus taught in what we call parables. The word "parable" in Aramaic also means riddle. It is different than the method teachers often use - that is when they ask questions for which there is only one answer.

When looking at a parable I like the analogy of the Sunday school teacher who would consistently ask a question were the answer to the question was either "Jesus or God". One day the Sunday school teacher asked his class: "What little gray animal climbs trees, gathers nuts and has a long bushy tail?" A little boy answers: "I know the answer is supposed to be God or Jesus, but it sounds awfully like a squirrel to me." The strength of a parable is that it has not just one meaning but many.

So let me give two basic understandings of what the word Kingdom means and thirdly how it is made meaningful to our faith.

The first understanding comes from the original Aramaic word Malkuthakh (Mal-ku-tah). It refers to a quality of leadership and rulership that guides our lives toward unity. Neil Douglas Klotz is a man who has helped me a lot in my interpretation of the world view of Jesus. He wrote a little book called *Prayers of the Cosmos* based on the Aramaic teachings of Jesus. In the book he says the ancient word Kingdom carries the image of a fruitful arm poised to create, ready to say "Yes I can". So however it is translated, it is related to the I can principle we all have within us, that causes us to step in a new direction despite all odds.

The second understanding is not so much about the kingship of Jesus. It is a passage, instead, about the "kin-dom" of God, about all those who are kin to God, and, therefore, and please hear this, therefore, who are kin to each other. You and I are kin to each other. Jesus use of the word Kingdom is about the very scope of God's love in Jesus for the whole world.

New Testament scholar Dominic Crossan suggests that the use of the word "Kingdom" in the New Testament was a deliberate dig at the Roman Empire. The Kingdom was a reversal of the empire.

If empire was about dominance, kingdom is about service. If empire was about profit and power, kingdom is about people, planet and profit in harmony. If empire was about human subjugation of the earth, kingdom is about interrelatedness with the earth.

In other words there is no split between the finite and the infinite, between you and God. There is no split between the spiritual and the physical, between the high and the low, between the invisible and the visible. For in the soul, there are no divisions, there are no separations. We are all indeed one.

Here is a story that brings home that truth. A man arrives at the gates of heaven. St. Peter asks, "What religion are you?" The man says, "Buddhist." St. Peter looks down his list, and says, "Go to room 24, but be very quiet as you pass room 8." Another person arrives at the gates of heaven. "What religion?" "Muslim." "Go to room 18, but be very quiet as you pass room 8." A third person arrives at the gates. "What religion?" "Hindu." "Go to room 11, but be very quiet as you pass room 8." The woman says, "I can understand there being different rooms for different religions, but why must I be quiet when I pass room 8?" St. Peter tells her, "The Christians are in room 8, and they think they're the only ones here."

Does that sound familiar? So much of Christianity has had this exclusive nature which is completely opposed to the way

Jesus uses the word. Jesus refers to it as a party, a banquet, a feast to which all are invited. Who then is included in the kingdom of God? The answer is, who and what are not included in the kingdom of God.

It used to be radical to suggest that the kingdom is more than just the assembly of your preferred denomination. Then it was radical to suggest that all faiths have a valid way to liberation. Then it was radical to suggest that the kingdom is a state of consciousness where all religions are celebrated. Now, we need a new and even more radical theology. Nothing less than the inclusion of all creation, human and non human, that comprises the kingdom of God.

The Kingdom then is Jesus primary image for a new consciousness. Not a physical place, but a new way of seeing and thinking. So these I think are the two meanings of the word. The principle of I can do it and the kin-ship we have with each other. But Here comes the hard part. You will never know this spiritual truth unless you repent.

It is hard because the word repentance comes with a lot of baggage and no longer points to its deeper meaning. The Greek word is metanoia (met-ta-noy-ya), and it means to move beyond the mind, to a transformation of consciousness. It means a change in another direction entirely. It means a wider, more expansive way of seeing and addressing life's great dilemmas. It

means nothing less than a profound change of mind that results in a new way of seeing.

The scriptures that were read this morning give us an insight into what is necessary. In the story of Paul we read that something like scales fell from his eyes. In the story we heard from John's Gospel he speaks of the same reality. The blind man says: "One thing I know, once I was blind but now I see." Spiritual blindness is very real. We all suffer from it. To illustrate what I mean I want to recall the number of times when the church had scales on its eyes, where the church suffered from spiritual blindness.

1. The church at one time was blind to the fact that the institution of slavery was part of the status quo of the church.
2. The church has at one time refused to allow women to fully participate in the life of the church.
3. The church has had a history of treating other religions as of little value.
4. The church has historically colluded with Empire builders to restrict and destroy indigenous cultures.
5. The church at one time was very anti-Semitic.

6. The church at one time encouraged the domination of the good earth and helped set the stage for the rape of our planet.

7. The church has excluded and, in some places, still excludes LGBTQ communities.

In every case where exclusion has taken place one question needs to be asked. Why is it that there is such opposition to what Jesus said about the least, last, lowest, and the lost? In every situation scales had to be removed from our eyes. In every circumstance we had to move in another direction and say “I once was blind but now I see.”

My point is that Christianity has always been a movement and that most churches try to keep the church from being a movement and attempt to freeze Christianity into one point of view. The Kin-dom that Jesus talks about requires us to change our mind and open the doors of our perception that we may see with new eyes.

Writer Ann LaMott grew up with both parents who were atheists and had nothing to do with religion, but later in Ann's life she began attending church. She was asked why she attended church. She replied with an unusual answer. “So I can practice being human.” In her memoir *Travelling Mercies* she tells many stories about church.

One of them is about one person who allows herself to let the scales fall from her eyes and began to see in a new way. She writes:

"Ranola is a backbone of the church she attends. She sings in the choir, teaches Sunday school and is there every time the doors are opened. Everybody loves Ranola, and Ranola loves everybody - well, almost everybody. Ken also attends the church. Ken has AIDS. Ken also is gay. Ranola, raised by conservative Baptists in the South, never knew what to do with Ken, so she usually just ignored him. Ken attended the church faithfully for a year, but then got very sick and had to miss several weeks.

On the Sunday he came back to church, Ranola continued in her standoffishness until they sang "His Eye is on the Sparrow." As they sang, Ranola looked out from her place in the choir loft and saw Ken, his body devastated by disease. He was sitting because he didn't have the strength to stand, but still he sang with great joy: "Why should I feel discouraged? Why should the shadows fall?" And as she looked, and as they sang, Ranola left the choir loft and went to where Ken was sitting, and she reached down and lifted him up and held him as they sang.

Now I doubt that when she got up that morning Ranola imagined that by noontime, she would have held a gay man with AIDS and sung a song. But, somehow that day from her perch in the choir loft, Ranola looked out at the world and saw it from a

completely different perspective. She looked at Ken with new eyes and her life was changed. She could say - I once was blind but now I see.”

It is possible to see things differently not only in nature but in human nature. May we truly be able to sing?

*Teach me God to wonder. Teach me God to see.
Let me God be ready. Let me be awake,
in your world of loving, my place take. Amen*

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

In celebration of Earth day let us come together for our Pastoral Prayer for the Planet

God of the universe, you who is the origin of what is and what will be, we thank you for the wondrous planet Earth and its placement among galaxies, stars, and planets. We thank you for its abundance of life: for the plant life draped green and flowered over the globe, for all the creatures that swim through the seas, for the astounding range of animal life, and for the ways you are seen and sensed in the creatures of Earth.

We thank you for our creation that is part of the fabric of this world, and for the blessing of being inhabitants of Earth.

We thank you for the beauty of this island that is our home, for flowers and birdsong and chorusing frogs, for the stewardship of all who have come before us, and for all who care for the land in our time.

We thank you for the gifts of water and air, and for the sustaining food that soil and human labour yield, and for Earth's provision of all our needs.

We thank you for this world instilled with beauty, for the abundant generosity of your gifts, your world.

God of all the suffering Earth, We also ask that your forgive us for wasting the world we are given, for our failure of empathy for our animal and avian kin, for closing our eyes to human poverty and hardship, for our unwillingness to listen to voices that remember the wisdom of land, for squandering the legacy of coming generations, and for our refusal to honour your body, your world.

We pray for all who suffer from a disrupted climate: for those who endure famines and floods, droughts and wildfires, hurricanes and heatwaves; those who face hunger, thirst, and disease; those displaced by climate and resulting conflicts.

Turn us back to the ways of your life.

Create in us hearts that are filled with love of the earth.

Show us our vocations as guardians of this planet.

Give us courage to do the work of our time.

Align our lives with you and with creation that we might walk humbly with you here, now and always as we remember the words that you taught us saying . Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Closing Hymn

I end to with the song I referenced in my sermon “Teach Me, God, To Wonder” written in 1973 by Walter Farquharson and music by Ron Klusmeier. Until we meet again.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiPu9NCSZis>)