

“Open Hearts to the Riches of God’s Grace” Luke 12:32-40
A Sermon for the 12th Sunday of Pentecost 11 August 2013
St. Aidan Church, Moose Jaw

The Gift of the Kingdom

Our Gospel lesson this morning begins with a sentence I find much comfort in

- Jesus says: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”
 - I find much comfort in Jesus’ words “Fear not, little flock” (in the KJV)
 - In spite of the fact that we are small, fragile, and, frankly, often stupid sheep, we are recipients of God’s Kingdom
 - That, in short, is grace we could stop there and just sing, but I know that there are some here who might understand their diminutive status (“little flock”), but the “Kingdom” of God is a rather vague notion

So what is the Kingdom?

- When I think about answering this question I am reminded of Mt 19:28 when Jesus describes the end of all things as the *palingenesis*, a word we could translate as the “re-Genesis” of all things all of history is swept toward a climactic event when everything, once-for-all, will be cleansed and renewed
- Everything is purged and becomes what it is supposed to be under the fiery love of the Rule of the King
- Tolkien gets this right at the end of *The Lord of the Rings* when Sam Gamgee awakes in the land of Ithilien after the Ring had been cast into Mount Doom and he and Frodo had been rescued by the Eagles
 - After awakening from a long sleep he lays back in bed and exclaims to Gandalf in moment between bewilderment and great joy: “Gandalf! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself. Is everything sad going to come untrue?” (pp. 229-30 *RTK*)
- Take those same words and ask Jesus the same question: “Jesus! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself. Is everything sad going to come untrue?” and Jesus will answer: “Yes!”
- “Is everything sad going to come untrue” Will all evil come undone, everything? Will evil not just be ignored or medicated, but actually undone?
- The Kingdom signals the time when every bad thing will be transmuted into a greater joy *because* you have experienced it every problem, every evil, every pain will be undone, *not just covered over*
- The new glorious reality is better for the fact that there was a need for suffering, for bravery, for a cross
- Because of the fiery joyful glory and absolute rule of our Loving King, everything is healed (for example, Ps 96 puts it this way: “Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD; for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth.” [Psalms 96:11-13 NRSV])

That’s the Kingdom; that is what is promised for the future!

- But here’s the paradox, Jesus uses the *past tense* in Lk 12:32: “Your Father *has been pleased* to give you the Kingdom” Here the NIV just has the better of it over the NRSV (“It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”)

Jesus frequently speaks about the Kingdom, and often he refers to it as future

- Here is the thing though, the Bible promises time-travel: *not you going to the future, but the future coming into you*
- In Titus 3:6 Paul writes: “God *saved* us through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit”
- That power which will regenerate everything in the future has come into your life and mine already – partially, not fully, but really ... and now
- That is what new birth is, that is what receiving the Holy Spirit means, that’s what being “born from above” means, and that’s what v. 32 means
- The gift of the Kingdom – the time of renewal of all things – is available to some degree now to those who believe in and follow Jesus Christ

Before moving on, please realize how different this is from moral reformation

- We should not under value the way many people have made massive moral changes through self-control, self-discipline, and community in triumphing over difficult circumstances (e.g., drug addiction, alcohol, depression, etc.)
- But in those circumstances, you are in control, you decide how far to go
- But receiving the gift of the Kingdom is something that is done *for you* and you have no idea where it is going to take you
 - Let me describe it this way: let’s say you invite someone into your home to caulk a few leaks in around your bathtub, but when you get home you realize the repairman has torn out the tub, ripped off the tile, taken out the drywall and studs – all because the room didn’t need it a touch up, it needed a complete refurbishment! That was not what you planned for!
 - You may ask: Who have I brought into my house?
 - It is like this with Jesus: You thought Jesus was brought into your house to give you a little bit of help for your small agenda, but he wants to give you a whole new agenda
 - The Kingdom is the powerful gift of the future brought to the present, now, in your life
 - We think Jesus will give us a little self-esteem; but he gives us a whole new identity
 - We think that Jesus is going to come in and fix up the cottage; but Jesus arrives and starts building a castle with high towers
 - Why? Because he is making your home fit as a residence for the King
 - With the gift of the Kingdom we must expect radical newness, not simply moral reformation
 - There is no habit, no hurt, no guilt, nothing in your past that this can’t move, remove, transmute or overcome - Give up your conditions
 - That is the gift of the kingdom which the Father has given you
 - It is partial, but it is real
 - That is the gift of the Kingdom, now let’s look at a couple of responses to it

Responses to the Kingdom

- What are the responses of people who have received the Kingdom; what are the marks in a person’s life that is aware of the coming of the kingdom in their life?
- The first response, Jesus says, is a *radical generosity* toward the poor
 - We have to realize what it means to say: “sell your possessions and give to the poor”
 - It is a trampling on the OT view of the “tithe”
 - The OT standard was 10% of your income and that is your duty

- But Jesus is blowing through that because in the OT context tithes refer to income, whether it be grain at the harvest or pay for the day, you gave what came in
- Jesus is saying, however, you don't give simply from your income, but from your *assets*, your *possessions*
- Jesus is saying when you understand the gift of the Kingdom you are free to start liquidating assets, this blows past the old standard of giving – this is what people did in the early Church (see Acts 2:44; 4:32-37)
- Why? Because they weren't fearful sheep
- What is the opposite of radical giving? Is it stinginess? No, it is fear
- Jesus says if you understand the kingdom it takes away fear, which might explain why some (like me) of us are not more radically generous

A side note here, you may think I've been talking a lot about money lately

- Well, that has to do with the fact that we are listening to Jesus in Luke
- The Gospel of Luke is constantly talking about money, and it is a Gospel that most scholars agree was written to well-educated, upper-class people – like us!
- We will never have transformed life, the Gospel of Luke is saying, until we have a transformed life that involves the way we look at our possessions
- A key response to the gift of the kingdom is a radical transformation of our regard to the poor

A second response to the gift of the kingdom is a *radical service* across social barriers

- V. 37 is astounding: “truly I tell you, [The Master] will fasten [“gird” in KJV] his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them”
 - This makes no sense to the readers
 - In that age, everyone wore flowing garments and if you were doing hard physical work – which only slaves did – you had to “gird” yourself for service
 - Masters never did this!
 - Joel Green, a superb commentator on Luke, writes about how radical this is: “In this case, a scene that otherwise reflects household norms – slaves awaiting the arrival of their lord – actually subverts the basis of the slave system. The master undergoes a status reversal, so that he engages in slavish activity on behalf of slaves.”
 - For those who were hyper-conscious about status, Jesus creates a blindness with regard to issues of status and roles, “here, [in the Kingdom] mutual service is the order of the day.... Jesus provides for his audience a vision of the [future], of a household reality wherein hierarchies of status are nullified”
 - Jesus here declares the nature of the reward that awaits the faithful in the future and alerts us to the nature of faithfulness in the meantime
 - Has the power of the kingdom come into your life?
 - Every society has hierarchies, but in the kingdom of God those things don't matter
 - For those who have received the kingdom of God, whenever we meet someone we stop sizing them up as those who might be above or below us and we meet their needs where they are, we serve them (e.g., Rikk & Katie Watts in Cambridge)

So these are some of the responses of people who have the gift of the Kingdom in their midst

How are we doing with this? How do we open our hearts to the riches of this grace?

Open to the Riches of Grace in Our Lives

- How can we have this? The answer is in 2 words: “giving” and “girding”

The first answer is that we receive the Kingdom as “gift”

- It is a free gift, Jesus says the Father is pleased to give you this in verse 32
- It is so obvious, we don't do something and then God gives us the Kingdom
- No, he the Kingdom comes as gift for the sheer pleasure of the Father
- Demands to do precede the gift, but we do have obligations in response: the Christian life is not a “got to” ethic, but a “get to” ethic

Secondly, in verse 37, we also must notice a second level, and that is what “girding” is about

- What this is saying that on the last day Jesus will gird himself while *we* recline at Table
- Reclining at Table was a place of honour, joy, and pleasure
- In the future, Jesus says I will inflict as much honour, joy, and glory on you as I can that is what “to gird” means so that all our deepest needs are met

Lewis describes a glimpse of this in his sermon “The Weight of Glory”

- He asks us to image the “River of Pleasure” and he says he is afraid to ask us to think too much about it, but we need to it occasionally
- Lewis asks us to think about the greatest food, the greatest sexual pleasure, the greatest music, the greatest friendship not that you have ever experienced, but that you can *ever imagine*
- As imagine this, we will catch a glimpse of what it means to be embraced by the ultimate lover of our souls who, at the Feast of the Lamb, will use all of his infinite power to fill absolutely and utterly our deepest longings to overflowing
- The best things we can imagine compared to *that* are like a dew drop next to the vastness of the ocean
- And Jesus is saying: this is what is in store for us, this is the feast that is coming
- If that is the feast that is coming, even the appetizers now are amazing

How can we receive the riches of God's grace?

- We trust in Jesus, because what he has done in the past he will do in the future
- Jesus became a Servant already in the past to bless us
- Jesus went to the cross in order to bless us and bless the world
- How do we know this grace will be ours? It is because Jesus has “girded” himself
- The giving of the Kingdom is because of the girding of the King

If we know this, to the degree that our lamps stay burning, to the degree that these responses are realities in our lives

- To that degree we can live lives of generosity, lives of service, lives of joy, lives of forgiveness
- The interesting thing about the Kingdom is that it is already but not yet
- There is a certain degree that how much of the Kingdom is already active in our lives is up to us
- We have been looking at Luke for weeks now, but now we can go back through the Gospel pages and listen to Jesus answering our question: “Is everything sad going to come untrue?”
- And on page after page we will hear the answer: “Yes”
- How do we know that is true? Because we can look what Jesus has done: He became a Servant for us, he has already done this in the past, and he will do so in the future
- Until then, Lord, open our hearts now to the reality of the riches of your grace