

December 3, 2017

## PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee, O Lord our strength and our redeemer.

AMEN

Today we do start a new church year. Advent is the first season of that new church year. And in the reading, the gospel reading, follows very closely to how the year ended. If you were here, last Sunday you heard the parable that Jesus told about the kingdom of God and the judgment that would take place. And in that judgment, we are judged according to how we live out our life before God and with one another.

If you look carefully at Jesus' teachings about the kingdom of God, and about our relationship with God and our relationship with one another, you will see Jesus refer to humanity in three pretty distinct ways. He refers to us as citizens of God's kingdom. We are invited to become citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Citizen indicates that we are chosen to live out a life under God's guidance, following the way of God, as one would follow the laws of any given society or nation.

Another way that Jesus seems to refer to humanity is when he teaches his disciples how to pray. And he begins that prayer with telling them to refer to God as Abba, as Father. So, this is another relationship that we have with God, as his children. And that is a whole different relationship than simply being citizens of the kingdom. We are in a relationship with God that reflects the same kind of relationship we have with mother and father, and their children. It also indicates the relationship that we have with one another. Not simply as fellow citizens of God's kingdom but as brothers and sisters.

The third way that Jesus often refers to humanity especially in the parables, is as servants or slaves. And certainly, we hear Paul pick out that theme as well as that of being children. When he talks about being slaves of the spirit, we are no longer slaves to the law. But we are slaves to the spirit. We have given ourselves over, our ownership of ourselves has been given to the spirit of God to guide us, to direct us in the living of our lives, and as part of God's kingdom.

And it leads us to look at one another or to remember first that we're in covenant with God. That God has made a promise to us, a promise of salvation, a promise of forgiveness, a promise to provide all that we need as we live our life here in this world. And that promise to bring us into the fullness of God's kingdom when this world comes to an end or we leave this life. But it also, in a covenant, there is also responsibility on our part. And that responsibility is reflected in what Jesus says to the disciples. To be alert, to be awake, that the time is coming when Jesus will return. And we need to be prepared for that, and we are prepared for that by the way that we live our lives in relationship to God, and maybe more importantly in how we live in relationship to one another.

We are called to see one another in the same way that God sees us. As beloved sons and daughters, as beloved brothers and sisters. And I do believe that when Jesus tells his disciples to be alert and to be awake, he is calling upon them to live out that relationship with one another and with the whole of Creation. To be aware, to be alert, to watch for the right relationship between ourselves and God, between me and all the people.

And if we look around in the world around us today in our society, I think you have to admit, I think we're lacking. That the prejudices have become so pronounced, is exactly what Jesus was trying to keep us from. I believe that the very prejudices and hatred that seems to be

voiced over and over again throughout the world, is what Jesus is referring to about being asleep. As not being prepared, not being ready to receive the Master if he were to come right now. Too many times we judge others. Not by who they are but by the labels that are put on them.

Anytime that we hate a people because of their belief, we're not seeing them with the eyes of God. Anytime we make judgments about individuals or a group of people because of the color of their skin, we are asleep. We are not seeing them in the way that God sees them. We are not being alert to what we are called to do, and we are called to show justice and mercy for all people. When we disrespect people that work for us in whatever capacity, because we deem them not as powerful or not as good or not as well-educated, then we are asleep to what God is calling us to do and to be in the living out of our lives as citizens of God's kingdom, as God's children, and as servants who have come into a covenant relationship with God.

And always, I truly believe always, I almost said almost always, but I truly believe always, we have these feelings and we make these judgments based on fear. Fear of who they might be, or what they might do that doesn't agree with who I am or what I think ought to be done. We allow fear to cloud how we see the world and how we see the individual. We let fear close our eyes to the way God sees the world. How God sees the individuals that God has created. And the most repeated verse in all of scripture from God is, "Do not be afraid." We are told over and over, Old Testament, New Testament. Don't be afraid.

Live out your life in the presence of God without fear. Knowing that yes there are times when things will not go well. There will be times when you look to another, brother or sister, and they will not return

compassion, mercy, care, or love. That has happened to Christians from the time that there have been Christians. Because the fact of the matter is, others are afraid of us as well. They are afraid to turn to a God they don't know. They are afraid that our beliefs, our compassion, our mercy will not apply to them.

Too many times they are right. They have been left out because of where they're from, or the faith that they profess or the color of their skin, or their gender, or their sexual orientation. They rightly make claims of hypocrisy because we are not seeing them as individuals, we are not seeing them with the eyes of God who sees a beloved child. Who God desperately wants to come into his kingdom. To be a part. To live in a relationship that has justice and mercy, forgiveness of all sins. To live a life of joy. To live a life of peace as they are, as they were created to be.

May we allow our fears to lead us in how we treat others. Then I believe we are asleep. And we need to hear Jesus again. Be alert, keep awake, see the world as God sees it. Encounter the world as God wants it to be. And it will be changed, maybe just a little bit. Maybe for one individual, maybe for a small group. But when we are able to allow the love of God to fill and direct us, then we are truly citizens of God's kingdom. Following the law that God has for creation. Then we are God's children, who see God in the relationship that God wishes to have for us. As father, as mother, as son, as daughter, as brother and sister, beloved children of God.

When we allow the love of God to fill and direct us, then we are the servants, slaves of the spirit of God. We've given ourselves over, so that even in the fear of persecution, even in the fear of harm, because others do not believe the way we believe. We are still ensured of God's presence, still promised eternal life. Still promised that relationship

with God. It's when we become citizens, children, and servants that we are awake, and we wait to see the return of our master, our brother, our Father, of God.

Gregory Hein – Rector

Renee' Evans – Transcriber