

September 23, 2018

## Prayer

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto thee. Oh Lord our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

## Sermon

The focus of Jesus teaching in the world was the kingdom of God. And he gathered disciples to travel with him so that he could teach by word and example what that meant. And we find that in the gospels, all the gospels, that the disciples didn't always fully understand what Jesus was teaching them and how he was trying to lead them. And we have an example of that in the reading today he's trying to prepare his disciples for what is to come. How the kingdom of God is going to be established is through his death and Resurrection. And he wants his disciples to have some understanding, to be prepared for that time that is approaching.

And we're told by Mark, that even though he tried to tell them plainly, they didn't understand but they were afraid to ask anything more. Because they didn't want Jesus to think that they were not worthy. Or he was wasting his time with them. They were afraid to ask him. And, in the living out of life, we see in the disciples the humanity come out. Even though Jesus is trying to raise them up to a life that is part of the kingdom of God. And he's done such a good job of trying to provide them with what that means as far as living life differently than the world is calling them to live life. Even though he has called him out of the lives that they were living. And into this three-year journey to learn and to know and to understand who Jesus is and the kingdom of God that he has brought to the world.

That humanity of the disciples come through every now and again. It came through in the gospel reading last week when Jesus was asking, "Who do you say that I am?" And after Peter makes his great, "You are the Messiah." And Jesus then tries to say, "Okay I think you're ready. I'm going to start telling you what's going to happen." And then that earthiness of Peter comes through. "No, you can't die. That's not right." And Jesus says, "You have your mind set on human things and not on divine things."

It's got to change to be a part of God's Kingdom. Our minds shift from being centered on earthly things and to be centered in holy things, divine things.

Once hearing in the gospel reading today, Jesus gets to Capernaum, and he asks his disciples, "What were you guys arguing about as you were walking down the road." And they were embarrassed to say anything. Why, because they were arguing about who's the greatest. Who's the greatest disciple? And that's again, that slipping back into how the world sees things. It's not kingdom of God. So, Jesus again attempts to teach them. Brings them back to an understanding of who they're called to be as disciples, as apostles, as Witnesses to God's Kingdom. And what God is doing, and from our point of view, what God has done through Jesus as the Christ and the son of God.

So, he says if you really want to be great in the kingdom of God you must be a servant of all. You give up this idea of having power and authority over someone and you become a servant to everyone, for everything. To be there to present God's Kingdom to help them know and understand that they too are called to have their minds on holy things, on divine things. To change how they see themselves and how they see the world.

And he gives them an example by bringing a young child because he holds it in his arms. He says this is what it's like to come into God's Kingdom To be trusting. To receive one and to be received. And anyone who receives one such as this, they know and understand that they are coming to Jesus and coming to God. So, it's a teaching that we are called to hear and know and understand that we are called to shift how we think and how we see the world. Not as citizens of the world but as citizens of God's Kingdom who happen to be in the world. As we prepare for the fullness of this Kingdom after this life.

Most of the epistles that are in the scriptures, are about the same thing, trying to help people understand that shift from being mindful of earthly things and being mindful of holier, divine things. The letter of James is written by, we're not exactly sure who. It could have been one of the disciples named James. Some suggested it's the brother of Jesus who became the first Bishop of Jerusalem. So, others say the way it's written, and the time frame seems to be later than either of those. And it's probably someone who wrote a nice pastoral letter who really knew and understood what God was calling the church to. And he used the name James because

it gave more authority to the letter. It was more accepted. No matter which one of those is correct, it is a letter that speaks to the church about who we are and what we are called to be.

In this passage again, he addresses the humanity coming out in the people that are the church. That we are not perfect. That we haven't achieved that mindset of keeping our mind set on divine things, that we step back into human things. We're still guilty of sin. But we are called when that happens to be brought back and put our minds back onto the divine things. The holiness of the kingdom of God that we are called to, that we are invited to participate in. And even though we don't do that perfectly, we have that opportunity to be forgiven and to come back in. It's important for the church to have voices that call us back. Jesus called the disciples back, reminding them what they were supposed to be about. What he called them to be about and teach them to get their minds back to where it needs to be members of God's kingdom. James is doing the same thing.

Yesterday afternoon I was part of a standing committee. And part of our job is to interview and talk with and affirm the people who are about to be ordained as priests. They are already transitional deacons. We also interviewed one relatively young man who has a theology degree but is taking a year to attend the Virginia Theological Seminary to be ordained priest in just over a year. And what I found amazing and what fits so well with this is they've been trained. And they have already begun their ministry as the voice that tries to direct people that are in their charge. People that are part of the congregations that they serve back to that other mindedness. The divine mindedness. The holy mindedness.

And the people that we interviewed yesterday were so different. And yet each one spoke from a place of faith. And a place of understanding. And a place of humility in trying to serve the people that they have been charged to oversee. One story is of a woman who is about my age or Pam's age. She 63 and I'm 62 for another month. I just had to pass that on. She went to seminary years ago, she didn't get ordained. She went without a diocese supporting her. And she got her degree, but she was never ordained. After she got her degree, she became a chaplain at Springhill Hospital in Mobile. And she's been serving in that position for years. About five years ago she asked to be a lay leader at St Mary's Episcopal church in Coden. Have any of you ever been to Coden? Yeah me neither. It's a little bitty church on the western end of this diocese, that has 25-30 people on a Sunday maybe.

They haven't had a full-time priest for such a long time. Katrina wiped out the church and they rebuilt another smaller church on the same location. The last five years she's been going, and she's been leading morning prayer. She's been preaching. And in June she was ordained a deacon. In another few weeks she's going to be ordained a priest.

And these people who have not been able to receive communion every Sunday like we do. Now we'll have a priest there who is present not full-time because she still going to be a chaplain at the hospital, but she will be their priest. She will be that voice that calls them to look for ministry. She will be the voice that is their pastor. That is the one that will comfort them. That is the one that will lift them up. Is the one that will baptize. Is the one that will marry. Is the one that will bury. She's the voice that calls them to be members of God's Kingdom. And she has taken this route to perform that duty to serve those people.

Talked to a young man who even though he came from this diocese, he was released by his request, as he finished seminary and he is now in in San Antonio Texas. And he's there because he went to a seminary in Austin. But he was able to go to a church that understood that he wanted not only to be a parish priest, but also to be a chaplain in the Air Force Reserves. And they were willing to give him that opportunity. So, it let him to be there most of the time, but also to take the training so that he could be away. So that he could become an Air Force Reserve chaplain.

And he's struggling a little bit with, does he want to continue to go that way? Does he want to become a full-time chaplain in the Air Force? But he can address two very different congregations. The military folks that he's with during the time that he is doing his reserve duty in the six weeks that he was away in Italy to understand what deployment would be like. And he was that voice that spoke. And they were so different and yet he is called to both places. To speak to them, to lead them, to remind them of who they are. To remind them the road that they are traveling. It is a gift that he has and is being able to share it with those two very different congregations.

We have (name) who is down at St. Simons. And he is a young man. He has one child; the second child is on the way. The due date is November 13th. His ordination date is October 27<sup>th</sup>. It should be interesting. And he has a lifetime ahead of him. He's 32 and he's just now starting out. He's served as a deacon at St. Simons for a little while. He took Ansley's place in a lot of different ways. But he is also beginning to expand that ministry as

a deacon and will expand it even more as a priest as they reach out to their community. The deacon there has already done so much but he has a new mission as far as addressing the young people of the congregation. To remind them and show them what it is to be a follower of Jesus Christ. To remind them what it is to be members of God's kingdom. In a very difficult world that tries to grab their attention. Try to pull them in a different way. His strength of faith and presence is going to be something that will help lead that congregation.

We have a woman who was just ordained and is going to be ordained a priest soon. She had served as a Methodist minister. And she is the assistant at Nativity Dothan. She will be ordained soon. She is Peter Wong's assistant right now. And she has brought to that place a new way of looking at evangelism. And she has formed some groups that are learning to talk more about their faith. First to one another with the expectation that they are going to be voices that go out into that community and to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not just to bring people into Nativity Episcopal Church of Dothan. But just to bring them to the kingdom of God. It doesn't matter if they end up coming, it matters that the people that she is working with are being free to share their stories of faith. Free to share what it is to be a follower in this world, in today's world. There is a whole group of people who have been trained and are being trained to go into the world and help congregations to expand their understanding of who they are and what they are called to be. It's an exciting time. It's exciting to see and hear the stories of what they've already done in just a few months that they've been in place.

We are all called to speak the gospel. That's what it is to be members of the kingdom of God. It's not about some privilege that we have that we hold onto for ourselves. It's about becoming servants. It's about going out and not being afraid to speak about the love of God. To being not afraid to speak out and say that I believe that Jesus is the Christ. He is the son of God. He came into the world to show us what the kingdom of God is about. He came to open to us that kingdom. He died so that our sins could be forgiven, and we could participate in God's kingdom now. And in the fullness of God's kingdom as we leave this earth.

We are called to set our mind on divine things. On being citizens of God's kingdom. Not just for us, but so that the gospel can be preached to the ends of the Earth. And so that we can baptize in the name of the Father,

Son, and Holy Spirit. So, that all people have that opportunity to become citizens of that kingdom. A kingdom that offers true life and offers it abundantly.

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