

Thy Kingdom Come

Luke 11:1-13

Lethbridge Mennonite Church

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Today is the fifth and final Sunday of our 2019 Faith Questions series—a sermon series where your questions have set my agenda.

Two weeks ago, I looked at the question, What is the kingdom of heaven? Today, I want to address a closely related question what does it mean for us?

Once we begin to understand the kingdom of heaven as both a present reality and a future hope, what are the implications for us now?

In his book, *Reunion*, Canadian pastor and author Bruxy Cavey contrasts the kingdom of heaven and other kingdoms. Earthly “kingdoms” are defined by borders, histories, culture, language, economy, government, and foreign policy. You can find them on a map.

He describes the kingdom of heaven as “off the map. Sort of.”

It’s lived out in real physical places, in the context of real nations and governments and policies and histories. But it’s more than that.

It is “*a way of living* with Jesus our king; a way of being part of what he is doing in the world, no matter where we live.”¹

It is,

A realm of relationship with God and others that is harmony with God’s will and God’s

¹ Bruxy Cavey, *Reunion: The Good News of Jesus for Seekers, Saints, and Sinners* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2017), 120.

way...

The kingdom of Christ is not contained by any earthly borders, but it has representatives embedded within earthly kingdoms. These representatives may be citizens of the country in which they are physically living. But citizens of Christ's kingdom are less *citizens of* the land in which they live than they are *ambassadors to* the people of that land.²

I think that this word “ambassadors” is an excellent description of the role we are to play in the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom is not ours—it doesn't belong to us and it isn't ours to bring in. It is the kingdom of *God* and God is the one who will ultimately finish what God started.

But as God's image-bearers and the kingdom of God's ambassadors, we are to represent this kingdom's interests in the places and spaces where we find ourselves.

So, I was thinking about how I would explore this idea of what it means to be ambassadors.

I decided to go in a bit of a different direction than I had originally intended.

Throughout the Faith Questions series, it's been me responding to your questions of faith.

Last weekend, at our church retreat, I had the opportunity to see you—at least a few of you!—respond to Andrew Dyck's question of faith.

Andrew asked a very simple question on Saturday evening: If you had to describe the good news of Jesus—the gospel—in seven words, what would you say?

We were invited to write these down on the flip chart (as you saw last Sunday). Some did so on Saturday night. A few others did on Sunday morning. I was pleased to hear Andrew say that our church responded more enthusiastically to this exercise than many other churches where he tries this!

I spent some time this week looking at what you wrote. I don't know who wrote what (with one fairly obvious exception ☺).

But it was fascinating for me to look at how you—the people of Lethbridge Mennonite Church—

² Cavey, 120-21.

think about the good news of the kingdom of God.

It was a snapshot of what is important to *you*, what Jesus means to *you*, what the nature of the kingdom of heaven is for *you*.

I decided that this was an opportunity too good to pass up—a chance to interpret the kingdom and what it asks us through the lens of... *us*, an ordinary flesh and blood community of Jesus' followers that claims to be about Jesus and his kingdom.

In 2 Corinthians 3:2-3, the apostle Paul says a truly remarkable thing about another ordinary flesh and blood community of Jesus followers that was seeking to be ambassadors of the kingdom in the Roman Empire:

You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

They, and we, are a *letter of Christ*. What an incredible thing!

So, while we've already heard our Scripture reading from Luke this morning and I'll be referring to it later, the primary text this morning is us, the letter of Christ that is Lethbridge Mennonite Church.

I couldn't include all of the responses given the time constraints this morning. But I chose what I hope is a representative sample.

According to the ambassadors of the kingdom of heaven in Lethbridge, AB, Canada in 2019, the good news of the kingdom is:

Divine power meeting human needs through Jesus. To be human is to be needy. We need things that only God can provide—forgiveness, salvation, peace, hope, a future... These needs are met fully and decisively in Jesus, both in who he was and is, what he did, does and will do.

Living fully in God's embrace through Jesus. To be human is to long for embrace in the fullest sense of the word. To be accepted as we are. To be set free to become the fully human beings that we were created to be, secure in the knowledge that the love and the grace of God is the truest fact of the universe and is stronger than all of our sin and failure.

Following Jesus, our Lord, Saviour, Teacher, Friend. To be human is to follow. None of us makes this life up on our own. We need a trustworthy guide. And in Jesus, we have it all: A Lord who

doesn't demand mindless subservience but rather who is also our teacher. A Saviour who rescues us from sin and suffering who is also our friend and our brother.

In God's peaceable kingdom, love wins. "Love wins" can easily be reduced to a trivial cliché. But in the peaceable kingdom, it is the truest thing we can ever say. God *is* love. And in the end, the love of God will be victorious over all that threatens to thwart God's intentions for the world.

The power of the resurrection changes everything. The kingdom of God is decisively ratified by Easter. Easter is, like the Transfiguration, God's decisive "yes" to everything about the kingdom Jesus proclaimed and embodied. *This is my son. Listen to him.* This really does change everything. Death was not the last word in Jesus' story, and it is never the last word in ours.

In Jesus, God became one of us. The incarnation was a scandal to both Jews and Gentiles in Jesus' day. Whatever people believed about God or the gods, they knew that they didn't take on human form. That would be beneath them! But the kingdom of God declares that the king has become one of us. He has walked the human road. He has tasted our tears. And he has planted a flag for his kingdom in the kingdoms of this world and its victory is at hand.

Jesus, God's witness to unconditional love. This is perhaps the deepest of human hopes—to be loved as we are. To not have to earn the love of God. To be fully and finally known, as we are, for who we are, for who we were created to be. Jesus modeled this. Jesus says to a love-starved world, "This is what God is like. This is who God is. God is *agape*, self-giving love."

We're all God-good even when we're bad. In Christ, God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We are saved by the faithfulness of Jesus—he lives the lives that we were meant to live and dies the death that our sins deserve. He absorbs all human cruelty and violence and lust for revenge, all of our sin and our ignorance, and he puts it to death in his body on the cross.

God's grace, uncle's wisdom, for fumbling ducks. Well, this one speaks for itself 😊 But even here, there is the conviction that there is grace for the journey as we seek to be more at home in the kingdom and to allow the kingdom to be more at home in us. And a reminder that the kingdom makes its way in the utterly unique and particular contexts!

So, the good news according to the ambassadors of the kingdom of heaven in Lethbridge, AB is very good indeed. The kingdom of heaven meets the deepest and truest of every human need and longing.

But of course, we also know that this kingdom has not yet come in fullness. This is obvious as we look at the world around us, and within us.

What is the role we have to play in this “already/not-yet” season?

Quite simply, it is to live now according to what we believe will one day be.

We are to be one of the means through which God’s future trickles into the present.

We are to be those who pray, “Thy kingdom come” and then live as if it really *is* coming.

We are to be those who live lives of faith, hope, and love as a stubborn witness to the conviction that the future really does belong to these.

We are to be those who forgive freely, who do justly, who walk humbly, who love mercy.

We are to be the ones through whom others experience the embrace and the unconditional love of God.

We are to be those who pray, persistently, insistently, boldly, unapologetically.

Even when it’s hard. And we must acknowledge that it *is* hard, sometimes.

Sometimes the kingdom of heaven looks a long way off. Sometimes it seems like little more than a rumour. Sometimes it seems literally good to be true.

This is when we need to remember the second part of Luke 11. We are to be like that annoying friend, pounding on the door at midnight, longing for bread.

We are to keep seeking, keep asking, keep knocking because we are convinced that what we are seeking is nothing less than the redemption and renewal of all that God has made and which God has promised.

We do these things, we pray and live and hope in this way because we’re convinced that our heavenly Father is a better parent than we are or could ever be—that he longs to give his children good gifts.

And the kingdom of heaven is a very good gift.

So, don’t give up! Be persistent, in prayer, in faith, in life.

Keep praying, “Thy kingdom come.” Until it does.

