

The 22nd Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 24-October 22, 2018 - Peter Snow - Mark 10:35 – 45

“Grant us to sit one at your right hand and the other at your left when you come into your glory.” And when the ten heard this they began to be angry with James and John.

What were the disciples expecting? They were on their way up to Jerusalem, but for what? Clearly, they expected Jesus to be given or for him to take over the nation. This would be in line with their hope, “To make Israel great again.” MIGA

They were in on the ground floor of a new Kingdom what would mirror the Kingdom of David. John and James made their move and wanted the best spots in the new administration. They had a savior who would do it all for them.

Worse the other disciples were angry because they saw James and John stealing a march on them. All the disciples expected Jesus to set up a new Kingdom without the benefit of the Roman presence, and for them all to be given place in the new administration. What were they thinking?

The disciples, like John the Baptist, like the Essenes and like many other Jews of that period looked to the Messiah, the anointed one to set up as a King and create an independent nation again. How this would be achieved few but the Essenes had defined what they expected. Most expected and wanted a Savior to achieve what needed to be done. The Essenes describe in their War Scroll detailed arrays of the armed forces of the children of light, and how Yahweh would eventually overthrow the opposition.

At the back of their minds was the expectation God would do all this for them. Their idea of God was a National deity and they were his people. The Messiah anointed as King would then rule like David. All this would all be done for them, and better, all their enemies would get it in the neck.

All that teaching about the Kingdom of God went over their heads. None of the disciples got it. The Kingdom of heaven was like a Sower, Very Nice. Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed. Very nice.

If you are going to read the gospels you have to understand this discrepancy. The disciples didn't get it, and Jesus' teaching had gone over their head. John, James, Peter, Andrew and all the rest were going to be very upset by Jesus' arrest and crucifixion They were not only distressed by the loss of their friend but the loss of their dreams and expectations.

When the resurrection happened, their hopes were re-kindled. They continued to hope even expect Jesus would return and do what any self-respecting Messiah would do, namely set up the Kingdom of Israel again.

This is the basis of the disciples' belief, teaching, and doctrine of the second coming. Jesus was going to come back, appearing in Glory to finish what he had started. The disciples would all have front row seats, and everything would be handed to them without any stress on their behalf.

Jesus' second coming ushering in the Kingdom of God happened, but they missed it. Easter morning was the second coming. We are living in the Kingdom of God and the Risen Christ is our Lord and Savior.

Last week I mentioned Jesus' introduction of the Eucharist as a vehicle for the Kingdom of God. Why? Because Jesus could see plainly the disciples didn't get it. They didn't understand his teaching. They did not understand his teaching. They were with him because of what they thought he would do, but of his teaching they only had a superficial understanding. Jesus was desperate at this point. Time was up.

Just imagine how they had sat listening to his teaching and nodded their heads but could not associate what he was saying with what they expected. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a Sower, The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, the kingdom of Heaven is like a net let down in the sea. There the disciples sat nodding their heads but understanding none of it because their previously-held beliefs were different from those of Jesus.

Faced with the disciples' lack of understanding, Jesus had to leave for them an acted parable, a vehicle that would eventually lead them to that deeper understanding of what his intention was that evaded them up to that point.

Jesus took bread and as usual, broke it, but then went off script: "This is my body which is given for you, do this in remembrance of me." In Jewish thought of that period, the body represented everything that made the person recognizable. Body shape, walk, values, dreams, loves, hopes, beliefs and much more. This is what Jesus was offering his disciples, "Take it into you, eat it, let my hopes, my values, my dreams, and my love grow in you." Remember the parable of the yeast mixed in with the flour became dough and when baked, a fragrant loaf of bread, well this is what Jesus was trying to convey to his disciples, but he was not done yet.

After supper Jesus took the cup of wine and said, "This is my blood, drink it all of you." As Jewish men, every one of them would have recoiled at the thought of drinking the blood of Jesus. The blood of an animal represented the life of the animal, and it had to be returned to God from whence it had come. No one could ever drink of the blood, yet here was Jesus asking them to do just that, to take into themselves his blood, his life and that he would be alive in them.

This outrageous idea made no sense to those disciples. Only later after the Resurrection, did they experience this presence of the Risen Christ within them. Sometimes in the early chapters of Acts this presence is referred to as the Spirit of Christ.

The Kingdom of God is therefore not a future event. It began with the resurrection, and it is still running. When we accept into ourselves the values of Jesus of Nazareth we take our first step into the Kingdom of Heaven, when we invite Christ to dwell in us, then we take the second step. Remember Jesus' comment to Nicodemus, "You have to be born again". This is what Jesus understood as a necessary step for any one of us to embrace the Kingdom of God. We do this weekly. It is an altar call, a moment of decision, our accepting once more our Lord's invitation for us to take Him into ourselves. When I receive the bread and wine, I consciously assent to taking into myself his values and inviting the Risen Christ to dwell in me.

The Kingdom of God begins with the individual. We are individual blocks in a wall, voting members in the Kingdom. In our service this morning, the next words are repeated when we begin the Lord's Prayer. It doesn't begin, My Father, but Our Father. It is a 'Us' prayer. In it we who have invited Christ to dwell and live in us now pray for the world. We could pray this prayer for our family, this church, this community or our nation, indeed for the whole world.

Thus, we come full circle, as individuals adopt Jesus' values, hopes, and love for the world, allowing them to become our own. We invite Christ to live in us, replacing our self-oriented center with himself. Thus, we become creators in little, part of the creative process. For God did not create the world, but is creating it, and you and I are invited to help.