

The 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost-Proper 14-YearC-The Rev. Canon Joan Anthony 8.7.222022

“Do not be afraid little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Those are the words of the portion of Luke’s Gospel that we just heard. Jesus was speaking to a crowd who had gathered to hear him preach and at the same time speaking to the smaller band of disciples who had followed him. They had much to fear. They feared hunger, poverty, disease, ostracism from their own people for following Jesus. There was political upheaval, revolt, and the crushing of that revolt by the Roman occupier. There was much to fear and fear they did. Yet there was also hope and for those who believed Jesus and chose to follow him, there was hope as there had never been before. God had promised them the kingdom and God was true to God’s promises.

You know the saying as much as some things change some things remain the same. If we hear the words Jesus spoke in our own day and context, they ring true for us as well. Do not be afraid, little flock. There is much to fear or at least to cause anxiety in our lives at the moment. You have only to turn on the newscast, or read the paper to realize that much as the disciples had to fear, we also have much to fear. Inflation, recession, China and Taiwan, Russia and Ukraine, gun violence and school shootings, the list is long. And then there is the personal list each of us has. Health, finances, family, loneliness. Listening to those few words of our Gospel this morning, it would be easy not to really hear them, or to hear them as only pious words without power to change our lives and our situation. But we cannot stop there. The next words are crucial and are the words of hope to which Christians have held for centuries. “...for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” In reality, God has already given us the kingdom. The kingdom is all around us if we only open our eyes to see.

It is well to recognize all of the challenges of life, both in the world and in our individual lives. To ignore them is to simply put our head under a blanket wish they would go away. That never seems to work. As people of faith, we recognize and acknowledge all of these challenges from a different viewpoint, a different context than most people around us. We live in the kingdom which God has given us and that kingdom is one of hope not only for the future but for the present day. This hope is not the whistling in the dark kind of hope, but real, concrete and solid. It is the hope that Jesus spoke of when he said that the Kingdom was at hand, right at our fingertips, available to be seized and made our own.

The Search Committee is hard at work, listening to the Spirit, interviewing people and discerning who God is bringing to be the next Rector of this “little flock”. The Vestry is hard at work to be sure that the congregation is ready to receive the person God sends. The Stewardship Committee is hard at work to assemble the resources to be used in the ministry of priest and people together in this place.

Little flock, it is our task in this time of waiting to have our lamps lit, to be dressed for action, prepared for the new day that is about to dawn. This might become St. Augustine’s new mission statement. Lamps lit, dressed for action, prepared for a new day. God has given us the kingdom and it is our task and ministry to live in that kingdom and to invite others to join us there. It is a place where there need not be paralyzing fear, but energizing hope. It is a hope grounded in reality, in people and in the community found here where all are welcome. Why?

Because in the final words of this morning's Gospel; "You must be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

Many years ago the Church began the process of moving from the 1928 prayer book to the Book of Common Prayer we have now. Since that time there have been much experimentation and suggested alternative liturgies. But back in the days when we were first embarking on this project, one of phrases that was "new" to us was this. "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again." I remember hearing sermon in which the preacher made the point that the phrase should be this: "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ has come again." I remember nothing else about the sermon or even the name of the preacher, but that statement has stayed with me to be remembered, pondered and made a part of my personal theology.

At about the same time as I first heard this sermon, I moved from my parent's home into my first apartment. I had a roommate to share expenses. Karen was a young woman my age who I knew only casually. She and her family had been members of the Church I had grown up in but we had both been away for four or five years. When we went seeking an apartment, Karen needed one on the top floor of any building. That is always a prime location, no one overhead and usually more windows and light. But Karen's reason was different. These were the days of the book "The Late Great Planet Earth." There was much talk about the "end times" and the signs that seemed to point to Jesus' return. Karen wanted to be on the top floor so that when Jesus came again on a cloud, she would be able to see him.

It is easy to make fun of this, but Karen was sincere and like so many things in theology and scripture she had it partly right. There may be end times when the earth ends and Jesus comes in bodily form once again. We will simply have to wait and have faith in God's good intentions and promises. But in the same way both the preacher I spoke of and Karen had it right. The truth is that not only will Jesus come again but that Jesus has come again. Jesus has come and continue to come daily even hourly, not on a cloud but in our midst. Jesus comes to us in those whose lives touch ours and whose lives we touch. Jesus comes to us at unexpected times, and unexpected places. Jesus comes to us in the person who does a kindness for us. Often, we hear of people who unexpectedly pay for the meals of strangers in restaurants, of people who when someone does not have the money to pay for groceries will pay for them. We hear of people who go out of their way to drive someone home after their car breaks down, of people who render first aid and wait until help arrives. Jesus comes into each of those situations and many more, to touch both the person in need and the person helping. Unexpected, unplanned. Jesus also comes in more obvious ways as well. When we make cookies for a memorial service reception, when we wash the cups after a coffee hour, when we volunteer at the foodbank, again the opportunities are endless. This is the kingdom that it is God's good pleasure to give us. The kingdom that is not only for us, for St. Augustine's, not only for those who are people of faith, but for every human being. As people of faith it is our good pleasure not only to live in this kingdom but also to bring it to reality in the lives of others whether they ever come to believe or not.

The kingdom we have been given is seen in the ministry each one of us has. Ministry is made up of the sum total of all of our actions each day. We are ministers of the gospel, bearers of the good news that the kingdom is here and available to everyone. When I was preparing to go to seminary people would often say "Oh, you're going into the ministry." Actually I was

already in the ministry because I was baptized. You, too, are in the ministry, have a ministry because you too are baptized and because of that baptism you too live in the kingdom it has been God's good pleasure to give us.

In the days ahead, little flock; "Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, waiting so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. The master is already at the door, knocking. Our ministry awaits, the kingdom is here, Jesus has come again.