

Matthew 9:35-10:8

Preached for Stone Church of Willow Glen via Zoom by Rev. Samantha Evans

June 14, 2020

The Radical Kingdom of Heaven ... Has Come Near

Friends, hear Good News, the gospel, which Jesus the Christ calls us to proclaim: the radical kingdom of heaven ... has come near.

It is so close that we sense it, smell it, feel it deep in our bones. It is so close, we cannot fully perceive it, but by the grace of God, we have seen glimpses of it. It is so close, so near, and our beings yearn and cry out for it to be no longer just near, but everywhere, all around us, between us, and within us.

We cry out, like the Psalmist: we cry out, our very soul longs for God. And we lament. Our tears have been our food day and night, and we cry out: have you forgotten us, O God? Have you cast us off?

We long to see God, to feel God, to proclaim what God has done. To proclaim the healing and the hope and the wholeness that God offers, has offered, and will offer again.

We long to praise God with song and dance. And rejoice because we can proclaim that kingdom of heaven is not just near, but here, finally everywhere. All around us, between us and within us.

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

We call the gospel, the Good News. Not everyone knows that the gospel and good news refer to the same Greek word: *euanggelion*. This is a word which in the ancient near east was most often used to describe a proclamation from a king. The king and his courts would decide on some new law or new tax or new decree, and the king would send out messengers to proclaim this news. The king always called his news *good*, but the news was never actually good for those receiving it.

It always sounds like good news to those who already taken care of, already protected by the king, those already protected by their class, their family of origin, their wealth, and their status in society. And for the most part, for them, it is good news.

But for those who are already trampled upon, oppressed, harassed and helpless, the king's news is always soul crushing, heart wrenching, body breaking news.

The *euanggelion*, the good news, which Jesus the Christ proclaims is decidedly and unequivocally for these: the sheep without a shepherd. Jesus had compassion on those who were poor, those who were oppressed, those who were forgotten and exiled, pushed the margins of society.

And to them he proclaimed truly good news of healing and wholeness, restoration and life everlasting.

What makes so radical is that Christ's news then, now, and always stands in direct with the news of the king.

Christ's good news is radical because it calls the king a liar, the king's guard unjust, and the king's kingdom ungodly.

Christ's good news is radical because it proclaims that a radically different kingdom is near. And that kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, will topple every unjust king and kingdom.

Friends, if you take nothing else from this sermon, what I want you, what I need you to know, is that the gospel, the *euanggelion*, the good news of Jesus Christ, is more radical than anything you've ever heard.

It is more radical than the proclamations you are hearing in our streets today.

It is more radical than No Justice, No Peace. Black Lives Matter. Or Defund and Abolish the Police.

The good news of Jesus the Christ is more radical than you, or I, and any one of us will ever be able to conjure, imagine, or articulate on our own.

The kingdom of heaven has come near, and in this kingdom, all are created with dignity and respect. All are cherished, beautiful, worthy children of God. All are connected and all thrive together. And in this kingdom, there is no need for kings or king's guards. There is no need for militaries or police. There is no need and there is no space for hoarding wealth and resources. No space for inequality and injustice.

In the kingdom of heaven, there is no space for white supremacy, which subjugates, demonizes, and causes irreparable harm to any and all of God's children who do not fit or who aren't willing (or able) to squeeze themselves into the White-Cis-Hetero-Christian mold.

In this kingdom, this radical kingdom of heaven, all are sees the beauty and worth in all of God's children, exactly how God made them.

This is radically, fully inclusive, boundary-breaking kingdom of heaven, which has come near. And if you're like me, which I know you are, you yearn to no longer just glimpse that kingdom, but for it to come fully, everywhere. All around us, between us, and within us. We feel this in our bones. A call deep within our beings. Words we cannot keep down.

Which is why we, like the 12 apostles, have been, are being, and will be sent time and time again to proclaim this radical, good news of the in-breaking of the kingdom of heaven.

And we will soon learn, if we haven't already, that doing so may just cost us everything. People will despise us and try to discredit us. We may be spat upon, betrayed, and even arrested.

And we may even doubt ourselves. We may doubt our ability to stand up to the king. We may waver in our resolve to keep pushing for more. We may fear that we'll say the wrong thing or hurt the people we love.

But the promise Christ gives us, as Christ sends us, is not to worry, for this good news we are called to proclaim isn't ours. We didn't make it up. It isn't our power or ability that will bring healing and wholeness. It is only God's, and God will give us the words to speak. The power to heal. And the Spirit to guide us and protect as we go forth to proclaim: that the radical kingdom of heaven has come near.

Next Saturday I am participating in a Faith Leaders March. It is an interfaith movement, open to all people. We are starting at Temple Emanu'el, making five stops along the way to finish our march at Antioch Baptist Church.

This march is a response to Dr. King's Letter from a Birmingham jail, in which he calls to repentance, churches and denominations just like ours. To predominantly white, progressive churches that urged him to slow down, Dr. King said:

"For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in [our ears] with piercing familiarity. This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never.' We must come to see... that 'justice too long delayed is justice denied.'"

We are marching in unequivocal solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, who this day call our nation to repentance in the same way Dr. King did. We are marching to confess the ways in which we prop up white supremacy, but what we

do and fail to do, by what we say and fail to say. We are confessing, like we do every Sunday in worship, so that we might begin to take away the power of our nation's greatest sin.

We are marching to proclaim the good news, which God, our Father, has given us to proclaim: that the kingdom of heaven has come near.

If you are able to join in body, to march, to listen, to repent, and to imagine, I am inviting you to do so.

And if you are able to join in spirit, to study, to pray, to repent, and to imagine, I am inviting you to do so.

My dear, beautiful friends, children of God, the kingdom of heaven has come near. Hallelujah and amen.