

"Kingdom Living"

Mark 1:14-20

Third S. a. t. Epiphany

Messiah, Boerne

January 21, 2024

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Text: Mark 1:14-20

Dear Friends in Christ:

I enjoy amusement parks, and I've gone to a lot of them over the years: from Cedar Point in Sandusky, Ohio, to Fiesta Texas in San Antonio; from Kings Dominion near Richmond, Virginia, to "The Magic Kingdom" at Disney World, in Orlando, Florida. Why do I enjoy amusement parks so much? Probably because of their reason for existence: to *amuse* people, that is, for people to have *fun*!

My enjoyment of amusement parks began when I was just a little boy and my parents took me to what is still my *favorite* amusement park: Disneyland, in Anaheim, California. And it was *great* to have an experienced guide to maximize my fun at Disneyland: my Uncle Dick. He had lived in southern California

all his life and visited Disneyland several times a year for many years with my Aunt Joy and my cousins, Pam and Karen. With all that life experience, Uncle Dick knew a thing or two about "kingdom living."

Well, in our text today we hear about another kingdom, "the kingdom of God" (v. 15) and someone who knows *all about* "kingdom living," our Lord Jesus Christ. You see, the kingdom of God is God's gracious rule in the lives of His people, specifically by the Holy Spirit through repentance and the forgiveness of sins. When Jesus took on human flesh and blood at His incarnation and was born of the Virgin Mary, He took humanity's place under God's law (Gal 4:4), and the kingdom of God became visible. At His baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptizer, Jesus identified with all humanity, fulfilling the righteous requirements of God. And on the cross of Calvary, Christ took humanity's place under the judgement of God's law, paying the ransom price for the sins of the world. In fact, as St. Paul writes in his letter to the Colossians,

[Jesus] is the *icon* [that is, the *exact image*] of God. . .

. In him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross.

(Col 1:15, 19-20)

Thus, in Jesus Christ, God's kingdom became visible, and God's will was fulfilled.

As our text says, from the beginning of His ministry, Jesus proclaimed, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (vv. 14-5). You see, not only in the Person, but also in the Work of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God became visible. When Jesus worked miracles, for example, healing the sick, casting out demons, changing water to wine, calming the storm on the sea, and forgiving sinners, God was showing His grace toward sinful, helpless, and hopeless people, like you and me. Truly in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, God and His kingdom were—and are—made visible.

God's kingdom is visible, however, not only in Jesus Christ, but also in His followers, in you and me, as we live in repentance and faith in the Gospel. For example, I remember when I was visiting my relatives in California as a tenth grader, around 16 or 17 years of age. I went with my family to the ticket booth to buy tickets for entrance into Disneyland. I couldn't believe how expensive they were! I knew I didn't have that kind of money, but my parents bought *my* way into the park. In a similar way, there's no way any of us can buy our way into God's kingdom. It's way too expensive! But God the Father bought our way into the kingdom with the blood of His Son Jesus

Christ shed on the cross. Indeed, He bought the way for *all* people to enter His kingdom through Jesus' shed blood.

To enter God's kingdom, however, *first* we must *repent*, and true repentance takes place *only* as a work of the Holy Spirit. You see, repentance requires true sorrow or contrition over sins, and sins are only recognized as we consider our nature and behavior in the light of God's Law, specifically the Ten Commandments. When we hear God's Word concerning the original sin of Adam and Eve and how the corruption and guilt of that sin has been passed down from generation to generation, and when we compare our sinful deeds to the righteous demands of God's commandments, we recognize our sinfulness and fear His wrath and punishment. For example, God's law reveals our sinfulness of nature and behavior by our failure to be gracious in our dealings with other people, forgiving them as God in Christ Jesus has forgiven us (Eph 4:32). True repentance fears God's just and eternal condemnation in hell, and results in a complete change in our thoughts and behavior.

But even as we fear God's wrath and condemnation, we also rejoice in His full forgiveness through Jesus Christ. God loves His whole creation and sent His only begotten and beloved Son to redeem His creation from its bondage to sin, death, and the devil. We deserve nothing but eternal condemnation, but Jesus was condemned to die in our place and

paid the ransom price for our freedom by His death on the cross so that we might be saved through Him. Now, everyone who believes in Jesus as their Lord and Savior receives the Holy Spirit, saving faith, and the full forgiveness of all their sins. Jesus has gone before us to prepare "good works of grace," that is, acts of mercy, for us to do (Eph 2:10). Now, as His followers, we are equipped by the gifts of the Holy Spirit to join Jesus in His mission to rule graciously and to show mercy in the lives of the people we meet.

After announcing that the kingdom of God is here in His Person and Work (v. 15), Jesus began His ministry by calling four men to follow Him as His disciples: Peter, Andrew, James, and John (vv. 16-20). Jesus was an expert in kingdom living—indeed, He was—and *is*—King of kings and Lord of lords, and through His word He called these four men—and you and me as well—to follow Him in kingdom living.

What does "kingdom living" look like? Well, first, kingdom living—following Jesus as His disciple—means to *subordinate everything to Him*. It means putting Jesus first in our life and everything else behind Him. Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John were all fishermen. To follow Jesus meant for them to leave home, family, their jobs, and security. This isn't easy for anyone to do. Yet this is what it meant for those first

disciples to answer Jesus' call to follow Him as their rabbi, their teacher and guide, in kingdom living.

What is it that we must subordinate to follow Jesus as His disciples? Well, we don't necessarily have to leave our homes, families, schools, or friends to follow Jesus. However, we do need to put Jesus *first* in our lives. We do this by obeying His teachings above all others, for example, by coming to church, Bible class, and Sunday School regularly, by honoring our parents, teachers, and others in authority, and by obeying *all* of God's other commandments. When we live this way, we show that we put Jesus first in our lives and are following Him as our Rabbi in His kingdom.

Second, kingdom living means to *imitate Jesus' ways*. In our text we see Simon and Andrew doing this by leaving their nets immediately and following Jesus. James and John also left their father with his hired servants and "got behind" Jesus. The disciples followed in Jesus' footsteps.

Like the game "Follow the Leader," "Simon Says" also illustrates this point about imitation, so if you are able, let's play "Simon Says." I'll be "Simon," and you all do what I say. Okay, everybody ready? Simon says, stand up; Simon says, turn to the right (*your right, not my right*); Simon says, turn to the left; Simon says, turn around; okay, sit down. Ahh! *Simon didn't say, "sit down."* Pastor did. You see, as we live

in God's kingdom of grace, we can enjoy ourselves, much like playing a game or visiting an amusement park, by doing what *Jesus* says (MT 28:20a). That is what it means to follow *Jesus*.

Third, to follow *Jesus* means to *share His work*. Our text speaks of *Jesus'* work as "proclaiming the gospel of God," that is, the Good News of God's kingdom of grace (v. 14). If we are truly to follow *Jesus*, if we are to be his true disciples, then we must proclaim the Good News of God's kingdom, just like *Jesus* did. We must tell people of their need to repent of their sins, that is, to turn around from disobedience and unbelief, and to believe in *Jesus Christ*, the Savior of the world. When we do this, we will more fully understand what it means to follow *Jesus*.

You see, and this is the fourth point, to follow *Jesus* means to *share the cross of Christ*. Dr. Martin Luther wrote about seven marks of the church, that is, things by which the true church could be identified. One of the marks was the *cross*. Luther wasn't talking about a physical cross like the one hanging above the altar, but about *suffering for Jesus' sake*. The church in America doesn't seem to suffer much for following *Christ*, although we hear about Christians throughout the world suffering for their faith. Yet even here in America, Christians do suffer, bearing the cross of *Christ*, like when people don't want to be your friend and reject you because

you're a Christian, or when they make fun of you and persecute you because you're a Christian.

Our text doesn't mention a literal cross either, but it does talk about John the Baptizer being arrested by King Herod of Judea (v 14). Because of John's arrest, Jesus left Judea and traveled to Galilee. Jesus' hour had not yet come, but after three years He also would be arrested, tried, and condemned to death by crucifixion. If you believe that Jesus lived, died, and rose again for the forgiveness of your sins, then you, too, share in the cross of Christ. And as you faithfully follow Him in kingdom living, you, too, will suffer for Jesus' sake.

Dear friends, I enjoy going to amusement parks, but I love living in God's kingdom of grace. In His kingdom, God forgives the sins of everyone who believes in His Son, Jesus Christ, as Lord and Savior, and by His Word and Spirit, He empowers them to follow Jesus as His disciples. So, let's put Jesus first in our lives and live according to His teachings. Then we will know the full joy of kingdom living. Amen.