

"KINGDOM"

PHILIPPIANS 3:20-21; 4:1, 6, 9, 11, 13

TWENTIETH S. A. PENTECOST

MESSIAH, BOERNE

OCTOBER 15, 2023

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

READ TEXT: PHIL 3:20-21; 4:1, 6, 9, 11, 13

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

ONE DAY A WOMAN WENT TO A PET SHOP AND BOUGHT A PARROT. SHE WAS PROMISED IT COULD LEARN TO TALK, SO WHEN A DAY HAD PASSED AND THERE WERE NO WORDS, SHE WENT BACK TO THE SHOP AND BOUGHT HIM A MIRROR, THINKING HE MIGHT BE LONELY. STILL NO WORDS. THE NEXT DAY SHE WENT TO THE SHOP AND BOUGHT HIM A SWING, THINKING HE MIGHT NEED TO EXERCISE. *STILL* NO WORDS. THE NEXT DAY SHE WENT INTO THE SHOP AND BOUGHT HIM A SET OF FURNITURE FOR HIS LITTLE CAGE. LATER ON THAT SAME DAY, HOWEVER, THE PARROT DIED. THE FOLLOWING DAY THE WOMAN WENT BACK TO THE PET SHOP AND TOLD THE OWNER HER SAD STORY. HE ASKED HER, "DID THE PARROT EVER SAY ANY WORDS?" THE WOMAN REPLIED, "YES, *FINALLY.*" "AND WHAT WERE THEY?" HE ASKED. "WELL," SHE SAID, "JUST BEFORE HE DIED, HE SAID, 'HEY LADY, DON'T THEY HAVE ANY *BIRD SEED* DOWN THERE?'"

YOU SEE, THE WOMAN DIDN'T KNOW *WHAT* HER PARROT *NEEDED* IN HIS CAGE, HIS LITTLE "KINGDOM." SHE BOUGHT HIM MANY

THINGS, BUT NOT WHAT WAS *NEEDED*. SHE HAD FORGOTTEN ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS OF ALL: *FOOD*. IN CONTRAST, OUR GOD KNOWS VERY WELL WHAT WE, HIS CHILDREN, NEED. AS JESUS TOLD SATAN WHEN HE WAS TEMPTED IN THE WILDERNESS, "MAN DOES NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT COMES FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD" (MT 4:4). BY HIS WORD GOD GIVES US WHAT WE NEED, TRUE SPIRITUAL FOOD. THROUGH HIS WORD AND THE SACRAMENTS OF HOLY BAPTISM AND HOLY COMMUNION GOD OFFERS THE WORLD THE HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE, PEACE WITH GOD, SATISFACTION WITH OUR POSSESSIONS, AND STRENGTH TO LIVE FOR CHRIST. IN TODAY'S TEXT JESUS TEACHES HOW THESE BLESSINGS ENABLE US TO LIVE AND PROSPER IN HIS *KINGDOM*.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO A NEWSPAPER POLL ASKED AMERICANS, "IN WHOM DO YOU PUT YOUR TRUST?" AND SEVERAL OPTIONS WERE OFFERED. EIGHTY PERCENT OF THE RESPONDENTS SAID THEY PUT THEIR TRUST IN THE MILITARY. IN THAT SAME POLL ONLY FIFTY-SIX PERCENT OF THOSE RESPONDING SAID THEY PUT THEIR TRUST IN THE CHURCH. NOW, I KNOW THAT "THE CHURCH" IS NOT THE SAME THING AS "GOD'S KINGDOM," BUT I THINK IT'S A SAD COMMENTARY ON OUR SOCIETY WHEN MORE PEOPLE PUT THEIR CONFIDENCE IN THE MILITARY THAN IN THE CHURCH. ALTHOUGH IT MAY NOT APPEAR TO THE WORLD THAT IT HAS POWER TO FIGHT BATTLES, THE CHURCH IS *THE MEANS* BY WHICH GOD WINS HIS VICTORIES EACH AND EVERY DAY OVER THE FORCES OF EVIL IN

THIS WORLD, "AND," AS JESUS SAYS, "THE GATES OF HELL WILL NOT OVERCOME IT" (MT 16:16).

IN CHRIST WE HAVE THE VICTORY! GOD HAS RESCUED US FROM THE DOMINION OF DARKNESS, FROM THE STRONGHOLD OF SATAN, AND HAS BROUGHT US INTO THE KINGDOM OF LIGHT AND LIFE AND LOVE THROUGH HIS BELOVED SON, JESUS CHRIST (COL 1:12-13). IN HIM WE HAVE REDEMPTION, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS (COL 1:14). BY MEANS OF FAITH IN JESUS AS THE SON OF GOD AND THE SAVIOR OF ALL PEOPLE, WE HAVE VICTORY OVER THE WORLD (1 JN 5:4-5). SO, LET'S STAND FIRM IN THE LORD AS FELLOW CITIZENS AND FELLOW HEIRS OF ETERNAL LIFE IN HEAVEN, AND LET'S PUT INTO PRACTICE THE SKILLS OF LIVING IN THE KINGDOM.

BY HIS SUFFERING AND DEATH ON THE CROSS OF CALVARY AND HIS RESURRECTION FROM THE GRAVE ON THE THIRD DAY, CHRIST WON THE VICTORY OVER SIN, DEATH, AND SATAN. THIS GOOD NEWS GIVES US A LIVING FAITH, AND AS WE LIVE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD'S GRACE, WE LOOK FORWARD TO THE DAY WHEN "THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHO, BY THE POWER THAT ENABLES HIM TO BRING EVERYTHING UNDER HIS CONTROL, WILL TRANSFORM OUR LOWLY BODIES SO THAT THEY WILL BE LIKE HIS GLORIOUS BODY" (VV 20-21). ST. PAUL TELLS US IN HIS FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS, "THEREFORE, MY DEAR BROTHERS, STAND FIRM. LET NOTHING MOVE YOU. ALWAYS GIVE YOURSELVES FULLY TO THE WORK

OF THE LORD, BECAUSE YOU KNOW THAT YOUR LABOR IN THE LORD IS NOT IN VAIN" (16:58). PAUL EVEN TELLS US HOW WE CAN GIVE OURSELVES FULLY TO THE LORD AS WE STAND FIRM IN THE FAITH: "NOW ABOUT THE COLLECTION. . ." (16:1). OUR OFFERINGS FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD BROUGHT TO THE CHURCH REGULARLY ARE A VISIBLE DEMONSTRATION OF STANDING FIRM IN THE FAITH. IN THE FOLLOWING VERSE PAUL WRITES CONCERNING THIS KINGDOM SKILL: "ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, EACH ONE OF YOU SHOULD SET ASIDE A SUM OF MONEY IN KEEPING WITH HIS INCOME. . ." (16:2).

THUS, THROUGH THE OFFERINGS WE REGULARLY BRING, THE BLESSINGS AND SKILLS WHICH ARE OURS AS CITIZENS IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD ARE PUT INTO PRACTICE. PAUL WRITES IN OUR TEXT: "WHATEVER YOU HAVE LEARNED OR RECEIVED OR HEARD FROM ME, OR SEEN IN ME—PUT IT INTO PRACTICE. AND THE GOD OF PEACE WILL BE WITH YOU" (V 9). PEOPLE OF THE WORLD NEED TO SEE OUR COMMITMENT TO THE LORD JESUS AS CHRISTIANS. THEY NEED TO SEE "PEACE," NOT JUST "BUSYNESS." A PEACEFUL, JOYFUL FACE IS ONE OF THE BEST WITNESSES TO CHRIST THAT THERE CAN BE. WHEN WE HEAR GOD'S BENEDICTION AT THE END OF THE SERVICE—"THE LORD BLESS YOU AND KEEP YOU; THE LORD MAKE HIS FACE TO SHINE UPON YOU AND BE GRACIOUS TO YOU; THE LORD LIFT UP HIS COUNTENANCE UPON YOU AND GIVE YOU PEACE" (NUM 6:24-26)—WE CAN LEAVE CHURCH CONSCIOUS THAT THE WORLD HAS

BEEN PUT AT PEACE WITH GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST AND JOYFULLY SHARE THE BLESSINGS OF THE KINGDOM—HOPE AND PEACE—WITH OTHERS .

LIVING "IN THE KINGDOM," YOU SEE, IS NOT A MATTER OF LIVING IN FEARFUL OR SORROWFUL OBEDIENCE TO A WRATHFUL GOD. WE NEED NOT FEAR GOD'S ETERNAL CONDEMNATION WHEN WE KNOW THE REALITY OF GOD'S GRACE IN JESUS CHRIST (ROM 8:1) . GOD SENT HIS SON JESUS INTO THE WORLD, NOT TO CONDEMN THE WORLD, BUT SO THAT THE WORLD MIGHT BE REDEEMED FROM ITS BONDAGE TO SIN, DEATH, AND DECAY THROUGH HIM, AND SO THAT ITS INHABITANTS MIGHT BE SET FREE TO LIVE FOR HIM (JN 3:18; 8:36) . IN CHRIST JESUS GOD OFFERS YOU AND ME COMPLETE FORGIVENESS OF ALL OUR SINS, EVEN THE SIN YOU FEEL IS UNFORGIVEABLE. YES, EVEN *THAT* ONE! GOD FORGIVES YOU, AND HE GIVES YOU THE FREEDOM TO LIVE YOUR LIFE WITH THE BLESSINGS THAT HE GIVES YOU. SO BE CONTENT WITH WHAT YOU HAVE, AND BE CONTENT WITH WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN TO OFFER HIM—NOT FROM GUILT OR SHAME, BUT FROM THE FREEDOM THAT IS YOURS THROUGH CHRIST JESUS, OUR LORD AND SAVIOR. THEN YOUR WHOLE LIFE WILL BE A GLORIOUS TESTIMONY TO THE HOPE, PEACE, AND CONTENTMENT THAT GOD GIVES FREELY TO ALL WHO BELIEVE IN HIS SON AND PARTICIPATE IN HIS KINGDOM.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, DR. ROBERT THOMAS, A DEVOUT CHRISTIAN, HEARD ABOUT A COMMUNITY OF POOR PEOPLE IN THE

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS OF TENNESSEE IN NEED OF MEDICAL HELP. HE DECIDED TO GO AND TRY TO HELP THEM. SOON THE PEOPLE BEGAN LOOKING TO HIM FOR HELP NOT ONLY WITH THEIR MEDICAL NEEDS BUT ALSO WITH OTHER CHALLENGES IN LIFE.

ON ONE OCCASION, DR. THOMAS WAS CALLED OUT TO A SETTLEMENT KNOW AS BROWN MARE HOLLOW. THE WALKER FAMILY LIVED THERE, AND YOUNG BILLY WALKER HAD THE MEASELS. AFTER DR. THOMAS TREATED BILLY, HE ASKED HIS PARENTS WHETHER OR NOT THEIR TEN CHILDREN WERE RECEIVING ANY CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION. THEY TOLD HIM THAT THE PEOPLE ON THEIR SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN HAD NO CHURCH AND COULD MANAGE ONLY OCCASSIONALLY TO GET OVER TO THE OTHER SIDE WHERE THERE WAS A CHURCH.

A SHORT TIME LATER, DR. THOMAS CALLED A MEETING OF ALL THE PEOPLE LIVING THERE. HE SUGGESTED THEY FIX UP AN OLD CABIN AND USE IT FOR A CHURCH. WITH GREAT EXCITEMENT THEY DID SO. WHEN THEY FINISHED, THEY ASKED THE DOCTOR TO BE THEIR PREACHER UNTIL THEY COULD FIND ANOTHER, AND HE AGREED.

ON SUNDAY, THE PEOPLE OF BROWN MARE HOLLOW GATHERED FOR WORSHIP. THEY SANG AND PRAYED WITH GREAT ENTHUSIASM. THEN DR. THOMAS PREACHED HIS FIRST SERMON. "THERE NEVER WAS A MORE ATTENTIVE CONGREGATION," HE SAID. WHEN THE SERMON ENDED, HE BEGAN TO DISMISS THE PEOPLE, BUT LITTLE

BILLY STOOD UP AND SAID, "DOC, YOUR FORGETTING SOMETHING."
"WHAT IS IT?" THE DOCTOR ASKED. "YOU'RE FORGETTING THE
COLLECTION," THE YOUNG BOY SAID.

DR. THOMAS WAS STUNNED. HE HAD NO INTENTION OF TAKING
UP AN OFFERING. THESE WERE VERY POOR PEOPLE. BUT HE COULD
SENSE THAT THE CONGREGATION WANTED TO DO SOMETHING. THEY
KNEW THAT THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD'S PRESENCE IN THEIR WORSHIP
CALLED FOR NOTHING LESS THAT THEIR TOTAL RESPONSE. SO
BILLY'S HAT WAS PASSED AROUND AND THE OFFERING WAS
RECEIVED.

AFTER THE SERVICE, THE DOCTOR SAT IN HIS CAR,
PRAYERFULLY CONSIDERING WHAT HE HAD JUST EXPERIENCED. HE
THANKED GOD FOR THE PRIVILEGE OF MINISTERING IN CHRIST'S
BEHALF AND FOR THE RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE WHO HAD HEARD THE
GOSPEL. HE THEN COUNTED THE OFFERING AND WROTE ON THE
OUTSIDE OF THE ENVELOPE: "BROWN MARE HOLLOW CONGREGATION:
13 CENTS."

THROUGH CHRIST AND THE SALVATION HE BRINGS, WE ARE SET
FREE TO SERVE HIM AND EACH OTHER. CHRIST LIVES WITHIN US,
AND IN THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION AND THE STRENGTH OF
HIS SPIRIT, WE OFFER OUR VERY SELVES TO HIM. AS LIVING
SACRIFICES TO HIS HONOR AND GLORY, WE CAN DO ALL THINGS
"THROUGH HIM WHO GIVE [US] STRENGTH" (V 13). JUST CONSIDER
WHAT CAN HAPPEN, EVEN THOUGH PEOPLE HAVE DOUBTS: AN IRRATE

BANKER DEMANDED THAT ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL REMOVE "THAT TOY" FROM HIS OFFICE—"THAT TOY" WAS A TELEPHONE; A HOLLYWOOD PRODUCER WROTE A REJECTION NOTICE OVER A MANUSCRIPT FOR A MOVIE ENTITLED "GONE WITH THE WIND;" ROBUCK SOLD OUT TO SEARS FOR \$25,000 IN 1895, AND NOW SEARS SELLS MORE THAN \$25,000 WORTH OF MERCHANDISE EVERY 10 SECONDS; A KANSAS CITY NEWSPAPER EDITOR TOLD WALT DISNEY HE WOULD NEVER MAKE IT AS A CARTOONIST. IF SUCH THINGS CAN HAPPEN WITH OTHERS, JUST THINK WHAT GREAT THINGS GOD CAN AND *WILL* DO WORKING IN AND THROUGH YOU AND ME HERE AT MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH.

DEAR FRIENDS, GOD GIVES YOU AND ME THE BLESSINGS AND SKILLS NEEDED FOR THE BUILDING UP AND FURTHERANCE OF HIS KINGDOM ON EARTH, THE CHURCH. THROUGH CHRIST JESUS HE GIVES YOU AND ME PEACE FOR TODAY, HOPE FOR TOMORROW, CONTENTMENT WITH THE THINGS WITH WHICH GOD HAS BLESSED US, AND STRENGTH TO USE THEM FOR HIS GOOD PURPOSES. THE LORD BLESS AND KEEP YOU AS YOU USE THE GIFTS HE GIVES FOR THE KINGDOM'S SAKE; IN JESUS' NAME. AMEN.