

“Live today in the Kingdom of God” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
December 15, 2019 Third Sunday in Advent
Isaiah 35: 1-10, Matthew 11: 2-11

Prayer: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

You can't help but be pulled into the world Isaiah describes in today's reading. The desert will bloom, weak hands and knees will be strengthened. Some of us would really like that! The eyes of the blind will be opened. There will be a highway there, a special highway, that leads all to God. There will be no more sorrow or sighing.

Two weeks ago another reading from Isaiah was just as appealing. Isaiah wrote, **they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.**

Wouldn't it be wonderful. No war. Strong knees. The blind shall see. The desert will bloom.

As Christ-followers, we believe what Isaiah describes is exactly what will happen when Jesus returns to earth to restore creation. You can't help but long for those days when you read such beautiful descriptions of life as it will be when Jesus returns to earth to bring peace on earth and goodwill to all humanity. We wait longingly for that day.

It's Advent, the season of waiting. We are waiting to celebrate something that has already happened, the birth of Jesus. We are also waiting for something that has not happened, the return of Jesus. We are living in an in-between time. As some have described it, we live in an 'already but not yet' time. Jesus has come, but not yet returned.

This in-between time can be quite disconcerting. It can leave some of us, during this advent season, waiting, not in joy and eagerness, but questioning. Questioning why God doesn't hurry up and bring peace. Questioning why some of us endure bad things in life – weak knees, pain, death of a loved one, loss of a job, fights within the family, fear of deportation. Questioning where this highway to God is located and wondering how to get on it.

If you are questioning, you are not alone. In today's Bible reading from Matthew, John the Baptist questions. John the Baptist questions if Jesus is the Messiah. John the Baptist, the person who baptized Jesus and witnessed the Spirit descending on Jesus like a dove. The person who said that he was not worthy to untie the straps of Jesus' sandals which is a servant's job.

John was in prison. He had been arrested by King Herod. John was questioning if Jesus is really the Messiah. Was Jesus the one who came to save the world, to bring God's peace to the world? Perhaps John was discouraged, after all, he was in prison. He probably felt disillusioned. He may have felt a bit hopeless, like some of us do at

times. So, John sent a messenger to Jesus asking, **“Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”**

Jesus answered John’s question with facts: **“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.”**

Sounds a lot like Isaiah’s description of the world in our Old Testament lesson for today. That’s because Jesus gave us a taste of God’s kingdom on earth, fulfilling what Isaiah foretold.

I think that John was just like you and me. Today’s troubles and concerns get us down. We focus on what’s wrong, often missing what’s right. John knew Jesus was the Messiah, but other things clouded his vision, blocked his belief. I know I can relate to John and his situation. Can you? At some time in most of our lives we reach a point where we doubt, where we question.

Perhaps today, you feel like John wondering where is the kingdom of God, where is the joy that Isaiah expresses.

Let’s stop for a moment and look at the term, the kingdom of God. We know that when Christ returns, the kingdom of God will be fully established on earth. For a moment, pause and think about how many times Jesus said that the kingdom of God had come near. He said these words when he was here on earth. There must be more to the kingdom of God than just Christ’s kingdom when he returns.

Have you considered that the kingdom of God is here on earth, right now, that Jesus brought the kingdom to earth when he came to earth? Perhaps that kingdom is not the kingdom Isaiah describes. Or is it?

If the kingdom has arrived, and I believe it has, then as Christ-followers that means you and I are here on earth living in that kingdom of God. That also means we are subjects of that kingdom. We are citizens of that kingdom. And as such we live and move and breath serving Christ right now – on earth – just as we’ll serve Christ in heaven.

Our focus as Christ-followers is to live like we are serving Christ the King – serving him now on earth. We are to demonstrate God’s kingdom to those around us, to live as Christ would have us live – serving others, the poor, the immigrant, the hungry – yes, serving each other. Doing so, we bring the kingdom of God near.

I realize that this may mean some of us may need to adjust our view of the world. I’m not blind to the fact that bad things, unpleasant things do happen. However, there are also many good things happening. There are many working to bring the kingdom of God to earth today.

I’m sure you can think of many historical examples of folks who have worked to bring the kingdom of God to earth. But, there are many regular folks who are busy bringing God’s kingdom to earth. Let’s just look for a moment at this church. We’re a little microcosm of the world. How is God’s kingdom expressed here?

I know a mother who cared for her daughter, cleaning wounds and encouraging her so the daughter could keep her mobility. I know of person in this congregation with a heart for the poor who works all year long so the less fortunate can have a better Christmas. I know of a person who takes those who can't drive to their doctor appointments. I know several people who call and encourage those in pain and who are sick. I know our prayers have been answered. We've seen the healings. We've seen the recovery of those who have been seriously ill. We've prayed as a church and as individuals for successful surgeries. All of you have come along side those who have lost loved ones and helped them back to God's highway.

I've seen this church come together to help the homeless with monthly offerings for the blessing bags and our quarterly food donations to the food deficient families at the Cathedral City High School. And this summer we hosted the night-time cooling center for the homeless.

Many times you do things I only hear about later. Simple things. One of the young girls in the church couldn't afford to go to her senior prom. Several of the women in the church made sure that young girl had a dress for the prom and the money to go.

I could go on and on. Each of you have your stories about how someone in this church has brought the kingdom of God to earth. How someone in this church has brought joy and comfort to you or someone you know. How someone in this church has worked for equality and acceptance for the poor and those less accepted by our society. This church has opened its doors to all people, poor or rich, gay or straight, single or married, democrat or republican. You have demonstrated God's love. You have turned the wilderness, the desert, into an oasis, a verdant meadow for many that you've touched.

Is our work done? Is there more to do? Let me encourage you to continue what we are doing and to look for new ways to serve God, continuing to heal our world through your actions. There are developments in our society today that are getting a lot of press. Because of these developments, Christian may have to stand up for the rights of the less fortunate. No matter what happens, we always need to be prepared to live our lives following Jesus' way. That highway Isaiah mentions is for all of God's children and it's our job to help them walk on it.

When you become discouraged, remember that all of us are a part of God's kingdom today. All of you are working, healing our world through your actions. That's why I delight in these passages from Isaiah we read during Advent. Because I see how each of you express your love for God by helping and healing, loving and serving, creating the world that Isaiah describes in today's Old Testament scripture bringing God's kingdom to earth right now.

And how appropriate today to end my sermon as I often do. May God bless your every effort! You are blessing the world with those efforts – keep it up!