

South Bay Community Church
Sermon Reflections
Previews
23 October 2022
Pastor Emeritus Dr. Stan Long

Scripture Text: Matthew 4:17

Sermon Preamble

Today, we are celebrating our anniversary of 37 years of ministry. Anniversaries are special. They help us remember, the what, and the why, that we need to celebrate. People choose different ways to celebrate special occasions, anniversaries, and birthdays, but many have found that these occasions are great moments for evaluation. On their wedding anniversary, a married couple watches video of their wedding and evaluate their adherence to the vows they made to one another. Similarly, our 37th anniversary might be a perfect moment for us to evaluate how we are doing as a church. We came together as Christ's followers not just to be another institution in the San Francisco Bay Area, but to give the Bay Area a different picture of what Jesus was about. What was Jesus about? Some would tell you Jesus is about saving souls, and Jesus died to make that possible; others will say Jesus was about modeling the life God wants all of us to live. We raise another perspective that **Jesus was and is about bringing all creation back under the Father's authority, and He called the vehicle through which He would do that the Kingdom of God or its synonym, the Kingdom of Heaven.** "From that time, Jesus began to preach and to say, 'You must change your hearts – for the Kingdom of Heaven has arrived'" (Matthew 4:17 Phillips New Testament).

Some of what is happening on planet earth is not the will of God the Father

When Jesus taught us to pray, He said we should pray, "thy Kingdom come thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We would not need to pray that prayer if God's Will was being done on earth. God does not enjoy the suffering and pain we see all over planet earth. Spoken in human terms, God must weep when God sees us shoot our kids, starve under-resourced nations, bomb other countries, exploit the poor, destroy relationship, and so on.

Nothing is going on today that was not happening when Jesus was physically walking the streets of Jerusalem. We might be a bit more sophisticated in the way we trample one another, but nothing has changed in the way we sin other than how we do it.

Jesus responded to the mess He grew up in by urging people to seek first the Kingdom of God. This was His passion.

Jesus' Passion was for the Kingdom of God

It became common in the late 20th century for American Christians to primarily associate the Kingdom of God with the future. To escape the pain of our everyday reality, we survive by focusing on a cloud-filled place in the sky where we fondly look forward to living with Jesus for eternity. We comforted ourselves with the promise of the "no mores": no more dying, no more tears, no more pain, and so on. We found such hope in the future Kingdom, but the present reality of the Kingdom tended to be under-emphasized or neglected altogether.

The truth is that Jesus talked more about the Kingdom than anything else. When He spoke about His purpose of being sent, He talked about the Kingdom of God (Luke 4:43). When Jesus preached, the Kingdom was the heart of His public ministry (Mark 1:14-15; Luke 8:1). When Jesus sent His disciples throughout the villages, He sent them to proclaim the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God was not only the heart of what Jesus preached. The Kingdom was the essence of what Jesus was and what Jesus did.

Jesus Embodied the Kingdom of God

Jesus was the visible expression of what He preached. Living under the authority of the Father was His delight. Doing the Father's will was His joy. When the Pharisees asked when the Kingdom was coming, Jesus told them. Referring to himself, Jesus said the Kingdom of God is right here in your midst.

Jesus' embodiment of the Kingdom of God gave Jesus occasions to provide us with a preview of the essence of the Kingdom. This preview is what the world would look like when it functions under the authority of God.

This world is not going to get any better. We will continue to invent, and technology will help us make our lives better in many ways. However, as long as human desires control our hearts, we will keep killing one another, oppressing one another, and using one another because the human heart is self-centered and wicked.

Jesus gave us a preview of when all that is wrong is made right

Jesus knew that it was going to be a while before the Father's will was going to be done on planet earth. So Jesus gave us a preview of what would be when the rule of God becomes the norm. Then, all that is wrong will be made right.

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim the good news to the **poor**. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the **prisoners** and recovery of sight for the **blind**, to set the **oppressed** free" (Luke 4:18-19). John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one?" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see. The **blind** receive sight, the **lame** walk, those who have **leprosy** are cleansed, the **deaf** hear, the **dead** are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the **poor**" (Matthew 11:4-6). Jesus is showing us that under the reign of God, all that is wrong will be made right. Jesus did not make every blind person see, or every lame person walk. The time for everybody to have all the wrongs made right was not yet, but through His miracles, Jesus gave us a preview of what is to come.

We are living "between the times." While the Kingdom of God will not be fully established until Christ returns, the Kingdom is still a very real and present day reality.

The Church, as a congregation, is a preview expression of the Kingdom of God

Now here is the special application to us on our anniversary. Just as Jesus was the embodiment of the Kingdom of God, South Bay Community Church is one segment of the visible expression of the Kingdom of God. Jesus gave His generation a preview of the essence of the Kingdom of God. In the same way, **we are called upon to give our generation a preview of God the Father's world to come.**

The Church as an expression of the Kingdom of God means that when we see something not as God the Father wanted it to be, we do what we can to make right what is wrong.

You might be thinking that we don't have the power to make the blind see and the lame walk. Our response is, don't we have the power to get a dog, a cane, or something that moves a person closer to the intention of God? If a person is lame, can we get a crutch, a wheelchair, or something?

Perhaps as we partner with God, a miracle may happen. Maybe we would see more miracles if we ask God for more of them. Perhaps we have become so content with what we can do, that we don't even believe that God can do those things that **only** God can do.

Whenever, we see something that is not as the Father intends it to be, and we then intentionally do something to make it better, we give people a preview and a glimpse of the Kingdom of God.

Like Jesus, you, as an individual, can be an expression and embodiment of the Kingdom of God

Pushing the concept a little further, you are an expression and embodiment of the Kingdom of God. You did not become a Christian by joining the church; the church can't save you. Rather, you joined a church because you were a Christian. You became a Christian when you gave your life to the

King of the Kingdom. According to the Bible, when you give Jesus your life, Jesus comes in and lives in you. Since you can't have a king without a kingdom, ever since that day, Jesus has been teaching you how to live like the Kingdom person you are.

Since you are a Kingdom person, you get the opportunity and the privilege to join Jesus in giving to your world a preview of God's intention for God's creation. Before you start your day, invite God to show you who God wants you to give a preview of God's intentions today. Ask God how God plans to use you today to change something that is not the way God wants it to be and bring that situation closer to God's intention. God invites each of us to intentionally enable our embodiment of the Kingdom of God to show itself – just like Jesus did.

God takes whosoever will let God use them, to reveal the Kingdom to a hopeless and broken world

Right about now, the Devil talks to us about our shortcomings. The evil spirit asserts that there is no way we could be an embodiment of the kingdom of God. None of us, in ourselves, are good enough to embody the Kingdom of God. Yet God takes whosoever will let God use them to reveal the goodness of God to a hopeless and broken world.

God will take the selfish, arrogant, mean, self-centered, thoughtless, and insensitive.

God will take from the Red, Yellow, Black, or White races.

God will take people like Moses, who cannot talk.

God will take people like John Mark, who cannot take the heat

God will take people like Timothy, with ulcers.

God will take people like Hosea, whose wives are prostitutes.

God will take country people like Amos and lying people like Jacob.

God will take unfaithful people like David and rich people like Solomon.

God will take older people like Abraham and scary people like Peter.

God will take dead people like Lazarus and self-righteous people like John.

God will take widows like Naomi and murderers like Paul.

God will take spineless people like Jonah and gossiping people like Miriam.

God will take doubting people like Thomas and depressed people like Jeremiah.

God will take burnt-out people like Elijah and loudmouth people like John the Baptist.

God will take worriers like Martha and drunkards like Noah.

Concluding message

Will you, dear God, let me give a preview of what it is like to live under the authority of God? Each of us can raise our hand and say to God, "Here I am, Send me. Here I am, Take me. If God can Use me, here I am for the glory of God!"

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Sermon Preamble

- What are some differences in the updated calling of Jesus from the calling of John the Baptist using the same words: "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is near?" "From that time"(Matthew 4:17a) marks an important turning point. John the Baptist said, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is near" (Matthew 3:2). John the Baptist placed those words in the context of a forerunner in declaring, "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord...make straight paths for him'" (Matthew 3:3, cited from Isaiah 40:3). Jesus says the same words, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17b). Jesus puts those words to repent for the Kingdom is near, in the context that Jesus fulfills the promises of light to shine on the Gentiles (Matthew 4:15-16, citing Isaiah 9:1-2; Isaiah 42:7). With Jesus, the Kingdom is so near that it has actually dawned.
- What does it mean to you that the sovereign, kingly rule and power of God (1) is something that has always existed, (2) entered the world and each follower of Christ with the coming of the Messiah, and (3) the fullness of the Kingdom of God is still in the future?

Some of what is happening on planet earth is not the will of God the Father

- What events in this broken world are sources of pain for you because they are not in accordance with God's Will?

Jesus' Passion was for the Kingdom of God

- In what ways is the Kingdom of God the essence of what Jesus was and what Jesus did? What does the Kingdom of God mean to you?

Jesus Embodied the Kingdom of God

- What are some actions of Jesus that let people see a preview of the Kingdom of God?
- Until the time that Jesus comes again, is the world going to get better? Why or why not?

Jesus gave us a preview of when all that is wrong is made right

- In what ways do you see the present day reality of the Kingdom of God, improving the lives of prisoners, the ill, the blind, the oppressed, the lame, the deaf, and the poor?

The Church, as a congregation, is a preview expression of the Kingdom of God

- In what ways does your Church congregation, when it sees something not as God intends it to be, do something intentionally to make it better and give people a preview or glimpse of the Kingdom of God?

Like Jesus, you, as an individual, can be an expression and embodiment of the Kingdom of God

- When the King, Jesus Christ, takes up residence in our life, that life becomes a kingdom. As a Kingdom of God person, in what ways can you give people a preview of the Kingdom of God?

God takes whosoever will let God use them, to reveal the Kingdom to a hopeless and broken world

- Biblical characters used by God have significant shortcomings. What shortcoming of a Biblical character resonates with you, demonstrating that God can use you if you are willing, even if you have significant shortcomings?