

“The King and the Kingdom”

3rd Sunday After Epiphany

Mark 1:14-20

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand . . .”- Mark 1:15

I once saw someone scatter a thousand pictures by uttering just one sentence. The sentence was an answer to the question, “What is the Bible all about, anyway?” And with the following one sentence answer, a thousand pictures were scattered for others to pick up, look at, and sort through. The one sentence answer was this, “A king and his kingdom.” *The Bible is about a King and his kingdom.*

What I would like to do in our sermon this morning is pick up some of these pictures, look at them, and sort through them together in order to get a better understanding of the overall image that they showcase—*A King and his Kingdom*. I would like to do this so that we can believe more firmly that as baptized believing Christians we are ransomed by the King and live under his benevolent reign and rule. And confident of this truth, that we would with great joy and enthusiasm seek to advance our King’s reign where we are with what he has given to us.

In our Gospel reading we pick up a picture. We see Jesus stepping onto the soil in the region of Galilee and uttering these words as his first, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Vs. 15). We see a picture of a King ushering in his reign. And this news of a coming king and his kingdom is called gospel. That is, it is good news.

In Genesis 1, at the beginning of the Bible, we pick up another picture. The picture that the writer of Genesis gives us is one of a great King who created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1).¹ He issued a royal decree, “Let there be light” (Gen 1:3). As the prophet Isaiah declares, “Heaven is his throne and the earth his footstool” (Is 66:1). The King establishes his earthly kingdom. He even creates man as his image-bearer, the one who stands in the King’s stead. The image-bearer then functions as the King’s spokesperson, representing him and having authority over the early kingdom. This is a covenant relationship that the King has made with his image-bearer. In return he requires faithful service as man bears forth the image of the king throughout the earth.

This covenant relationship has wonderful blessings, privileges and promises. Man, the image-bearer, has the opportunity to rule in the King’s stead and bear his character and glory. The covenant also carries

¹ The following “kingdom metaphor” is borrowed from Dr. John Bombaro, “The Scandal of Christian Particularity,” in *Making the Case for Christianity*, St. Louis: CPH, 2014, 125-134.

with it a great threat. If the image bearer were to rule in a way that is contrary to the King it is the same as claiming independent lordship and will be viewed as an act of treason. Such an action is like saying, "I will not have this King reign over us. I will reign instead." So also, siding with the King's enemy is judged as an act of treason. And the penalty of treason, of course, is death (Gen 2:17).

Within this kingdom metaphor, the picture of the incident in Genesis 3 is then brought to light. This chapter shows us a startling scene. The image-bearer, man himself, turns on the king, sides with the enemy, falls from grace, and commits high treason in the process.

Sin as treason. Contrary to a popular belief which tries to tell us that our pesky little sins are no big deal, understood within the framework of the king and his kingdom, we see that sin against the King's sovereign rule and will is a violation of allegiance. Sin is betrayal. This willful act of betrayal transfers power of the kingdom to the King's enemies. It is likened to treason. And the punishment of high treason, as it still is in much of the world today, is death (Rom 6:23). A big deal indeed!

Sin understood as treason reveals to us snapshots of its far-reaching consequences for families, communities, and later generations. Judging Sin, similar to judging treason, is important for keeping the rule of the law that is established by the just King and creator.

Even a brief survey of our lives gives evidence of our high treason. The Apostle Paul says it this way in his letter to the Romans, "There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understands, there are none that seek after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that does good; no, not one" (Rom 3:11-12). All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). All are guilty of treason before the King, robbing him of his glory and honor and stealing it for ourselves. All are guilty in one way or another of saying, "I will not have him rule over me."

The picture of Genesis, chapter 3 leads us to conclude that the world needs a savior. The world needs a truly faithful image-bearer who will come and reestablish the King's rule and bring to judgment the King's enemies and the enemies of his people. The world needs this one who, in the fullness of time, steps onto Galilean soil as the king himself in human flesh, the true image bearer, announcing the good news that the kingdom of God has arrived. The King is ushering in his reign on earth. He is reestablishing his kingdom through the Messiah, the anointed one, Jesus of Nazareth. Good news indeed!

As God's faithful Son and incarnate Word, he can truly and faithfully represent the King and speak and act on his behalf. Only he can faithfully fulfill the covenant with the King and reestablish the kingdom. Only Jesus can represent and redeem all humanity as our representative King. He paid the price of treason for his people on the cross (2 Cor 5:21). He rises from his grave to conquer death, the ultimate consequence of treasonous Sin. And he extends his pardon to you and all who are baptized and trust "in Christ."

Only Jesus was without treason, so only he could voluntarily take the penalty for sin on behalf of others. This is why Jesus is the only way as he said himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6).

This resurrected and ascended Jesus is hailed as the world's rightful King. He rules and reigns as he advances his kingdom here on earth through love, mercy, peace, and grace.

Pardoned by this King and joined to his kingdom and rule, now he calls us to bear his image. He calls us to give glory, honor, and praise to his name as we wear his robe of righteousness. He calls us to live as loyal, faithful citizens of his kingdom even as we seek to apply the spoils of his great victory and share his redemption and salvation with as many people as possible.

In our Gospel reading we pick up another picture. In this picture we see Jesus calling four ambassadors to join him in advancing the kingdom of God and spreading the good news that King of the heavens and the earth has arrived to reestablish his kingdom. We call these four part of the original Twelve Disciples. After Jesus' death they were given the authority to represent the King and advance his reign and spread the good news of the pardon of Sin.

This picture of the four disciples turned ambassadors advancing the Kingdom of God points us to a thousand other pictures ready to be taken, waiting to be fully filled in. The pictures that display God using you and me right where we are to proclaim the good news of the true and faithful King who has pardoned our treason and brought us into the Kingdom of God by paying the price himself.

Just as James and John's father Zebedee stayed in the boat with the servants and continued the fishing business, perhaps even supporting his sons with material and monetary offerings, so also even while remaining in our stations in life and doing the things God has given us to do, we bear the image of the King and have opportunities to advance his Kingdom and proclaim the good news. We give honor and glory to his name by living as his loyal subjects and doing what we can with what we have been given. We can do this especially by supporting the work of the Church through our representative city of the kingdom here at Atonement. Even in seemingly small ways through the faithful and generous giving of our tithes, through the sacrifice of our time in volunteer service, and through the exercise of our various talents the King uses us as his image bearers to bear the Gospel of the King and his kingdom. To him alone be all honor, glory, and praise. Amen.