

HEARTBEATS- Staying Connected 2/19/2021



Dear Friends in Christ,

If I asked you to name the thing that Jesus most spoke about, what would you say? Salvation? Forgiveness? Repentance? Love? Good answers, but not right. The thing that Jesus most talked about was the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of heaven, depending on which gospel you're reading. (Matthew likes "Kingdom of heaven;" Mark, Luke, and John prefer "Kingdom of God.") And of course, salvation and forgiveness and repentance and love are important parts of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God encompasses them all.

After His temptation in the wilderness Jesus began to preach: Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," He said. "The Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news." (Mark 1:14-15) Notice that He was "proclaiming." That means this was an ongoing message.

Jesus did this, too, in His teaching: "What shall we say the Kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants." (Mark 4:30-32)

Jesus told them another parable: "The Kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field." (Matthew 13:24)

Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless they are born again.” (John 3:3)

In the Gospels, Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God more than 100 times. Even after the resurrection, Jesus’ focus was the Kingdom of God. After His suffering, He presented Himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the Kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3)

Often, we think about the Kingdom of God as a future thing. We think of it as something that will make its appearance when Christ comes again. It is something to look forward to, but do we have a sense that the Kingdom of God has a present tense implication as well? Consider that regularly, Jesus announced that the Kingdom of God has come near, and He gave similar instructions to His followers: “Heal the sick who are there and tell them, “The Kingdom of God has come near to you.” (Luke 10:9)

Certainly, the Kingdom of God has not been fully established. But this does not mean that the Kingdom has not come and is not a present reality. Nor does it mean that it came with Jesus and then left when He returned to heaven. Jesus wanted us to know that God’s Kingdom is present in the world and that we can and do experience it regularly. It is present when we genuinely pray for others. It is present when we minister to others in Jesus’ name. It is present when we spend time in God’s word. It is present when we place ourselves in worship. By its power, Jesus’ disciples changed the world, not just in the first century, but today as well. Rejoice, for the Kingdom of God has come near!

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey