

**Pentecost 19A Sermon for October 15, 2023****Text: Matthew 22: 1-14****Title: “Thy Kingdom Come”**

Back in the 1980s, Grace Lutheran Church was a large congregation, and this beautiful space was full of people. You and I are the remnant, a small group of survivors. If we wrote a history of the difficulties and problems that have occurred in this congregation over the past 30 years, it would fill a book.

But what we’ve been experiencing is not unusual, when you look at biblical history. The kingdom of God (or the kingdom of heaven, as Matthew calls it – these terms are interchangeable) has waxed and waned ever since Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who was named Israel. They suffered all kinds of ups and downs, highs and lows: captivity in Egypt, being chased by Pharaoh’s army, being saved through the Red Sea, battling the Philistines in the Promised Land, and so on. They had good kings and bad ones: very good ones like David and Hezekiah, and very bad ones like Ahab and Jeroboam. So, God’s chosen people, Israel, often turned away from God, got into trouble, and God had to rescue and restore them, again and again and again.

But during each period of trouble, there was always a remnant who continued to worship the true God and obey the

commandments and they remained faithful to God. These faithful few eventually grew in strength and in numbers, and thrived once again – because their efforts were supported by Almighty GOD, whose power and love are boundless.

In the Inter-Testamental period, the 400 years between Old Testament history and New Testament history (or between Malachi and Matthew), Jews were ruled by foreign dictators like the Seleucids, the Ptolemies, the Maccabbeans, and the Hasmoneans. The lowest point was when they were conquered by the Romans. They were very cruelly treated, and terribly oppressed. The Jews thought God had almost completely forsaken them.

Then God performed the ultimate Rescue. Jesus was born. This low point for Israel became the crux of human history, between BC and AD. Jesus lived a holy life and was crucified, but God raised him from the dead on Easter, and after showing himself alive to many people, he went back to God his Father.

Jesus became the trail-blazer for all of us who follow him, especially in his endurance of suffering while still trusting in his Father.

In Mark's Gospel, which is the earliest of the four Gospels to be written down, we read in the very first chapter:

*“Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”*

The kingdom of God means the KINGSHIP of God, the rule and reign and sovereignty of God, and since Christ, we are in the New Age, the era of access to the real presence of God in Jesus Christ.

But, as you know, when Jesus lived on earth, he was largely rejected by the Jews, because he refused to lead them in overthrowing the Romans. He was refusing to bring about a tangible kingdom of God here on earth. Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world.”

Jesus' kingdom on earth was a kingdom the heart, of the Spirit – a kingdom of grace, mercy, and forgiveness; a kingdom of love and peace which will not end even when this world ends.

And by the way, that may happen soon, judging by current events. It could be that the human race won't make it through this century. But the Scriptures tell us that the Kingdom of God will continue until Christ returns to judge the living and the dead.

While we work and watch and wait for our Lord Christ to return, as is depicted in the book of Revelation, we Christians should take heart, and we should learn from the history of the New Testament church. The church in those days had to struggle much harder than we do today. In the first 3 centuries A.D. (or C.E. as it's now called) church members were harshly persecuted, and were constantly in danger of being killed. Many fell away from the faith. But, as with the ancient Israelites, there was a remnant who were faithful, and God blessed them even in hardest times.

Those persecuted Christians continued to trust and believe that God would bring them through the hard times. AND GOD DID! And the church grew and multiplied. Lately, the church has shrunk quite a bit all over the world, especially in rich countries. So we should pray to God today, as they did in ancient times: "Thy kingdom come". I believe that, unless the world ends first, the Western Christian church will be resurrected to new life by the power of God, the power that resurrected Jesus on Easter Sunday and resurrected the faith of the disciples.

I hope and pray that God will resurrect the church in our time. And I hope and pray that our beloved planet has a future; but if

not, that means that our next church will be the kingdom of God in heaven, after the final resurrection. I believe that the Second Article of our Creed is true. It says: “[Christ] is [now] seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.”

I also believe that Jesus’ parable in the first part of Matthew 22 (today’s Gospel Reading) is a true picture of the history we are in now, but I believe that Jesus here is also talking the Final Judgment at the end of history. Of course, Jesus was applying first of all to his contemporary listeners, the Jews who thought they were still God’s favourites, still holier than the Gentiles.

Jesus says in the parable that God is like a king who gives a wedding banquet for his son, and invites all human beings to a lavish Banquet Hall with a lavish feast. That’s a message about God’s free and boundless grace and God’s loving generosity.

The text goes on to say: “the invited guests made light of the invitation, and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, mistreated them, and killed them. (That reminds me of the bloody persecutions of the early Christians, and of many other messengers and servants of the Gospel who have been persecuted down through

the ages).

Then our text says: “The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to this wedding banquet [of my son].’ Those servants . . . gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.”

This can be taken to mean the inclusion of the Gentiles into the call of God and the family of God. But it can also be taken as a picture of HEAVEN, saying that it’s going to be filled up with all kinds of people, whether Christian or not. This jibes with what the book of Revelation says. It gives a picture of heaven as containing “. . . a multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!’”

And the Revelation depicts heavenly mansions that are rich and magnificent. It will be like an endless party, where “a great time is had by all”, and we will see a lot of people there whom we least

expected to see!

In contrast to the hardship or suffering we may have experienced in this life, the Bible tells us that in the next life we will rejoice with unutterable joy and indescribable happiness, as God gives us the fulfillment of our dreams. My friends, we have a lot to look forward to! As the old country song says, “When the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there.”

So, in today's Gospel reading, we have wonderful good news.

But we also have some bad news, in the last 4 verses, 11-14. We read that the king comes in to the wedding banquet and notices a man who is not wearing a wedding robe. The king says to the attendants, “Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Sounds rather harsh, for not coming properly dressed up! But the white robe serves as a contrast between outward appearance and inward evil.

Perhaps this is symbolic of the few, irredeemably horrible people down through the ages, dictators like Hitler, Stalin, Mao Zedong, Pol Pot and Genghis Khan, each of whom was responsible for the death of millions of people.

But the white robe, here, is also a symbol of Baptism, a symbol of forgiveness and the purity that covers a person when they're baptized – the righteousness of Christ that is conferred upon us and imputed to us for free. Who in their right mind would refuse the free gift of forgiveness? Perhaps those who are hardened and stubborn, and too proud to admit they actually need God's forgiveness.

In any case, this picture of heaven in today's text is very good news for us, whether we're facing imminent death or the slow death of our planet.

I must quote a wonderful passage from the Old Testament: Isaiah 61 verse 10:

*"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my whole being shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."*

When the world ends, sooner or later, and Christ comes back again to judge the living and the dead, we who live in Christ spiritually and glory in Christ's forgiveness, will be taken up to a dimension beyond time and space, and will rejoice and celebrate in that Kingdom that has no end. And even if today, this day, is our last day on earth, we



have Jesus' promise made to the penitent thief on the cross next to him. Jesus said: "Today you shall be with me in paradise".

**Amen.**

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION      October 15, 2023**  
**20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

Our God is a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger and rich in mercy, generous and forgiving to all who cry for grace. And so, with confidence we turn to God in prayer.

Merciful God, we pray for the church throughout the world, that we, together with all sisters and brothers in Christ, may be ambassadors of your love, hope and peace, wherever we go.

Merciful God, we pray for people throughout the world who are suffering from the effects of natural disasters, economic distress, personal deprivation, and displacement due to violence and war.

Merciful God, we pray especially for the people of Israel and Gaza. Have mercy on those grieving the death or wounding of loved ones. Help those desperately seeking safety, or who are in hiding or being held hostage, and those whose homes and lives have been suddenly destroyed.

Almighty God, we pray that You would guide world leaders to use their influence wisely and work to de-escalate this conflict and create space for dialogue. Give them wisdom and courage, so that soon there will be a just peace for both Palestinians and Israelis. Give courage to Bishop Azar, and the people of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land, as they provide support, encouragement, comfort, and hope.

Merciful God, we pray for all those impacted by the recent earthquake in Afghanistan. You came in Christ to be among those who are suffering pain and loss. Help those affected by this earthquake to feel your healing presence. Help responders in their courageous work and give them patience and endurance. Bless and comfort those who mourn, as they cry out to you.

Merciful God, we pray for the citizens of our own country, Canada, that You would give them peace of mind and put away the spirit of rebellion and lawlessness that has become a contagious social disease that erodes our civil society. Help parents to love one another and to cultivate in their children a deep sense of being loved, to help them to value the uniqueness and diversity experienced in persons they encounter, and a desire to seek and work for truth, justice, and peace.

Merciful God, we pray for all the rostered ministers, our national Bishop Susan, our BC Synod Bishop Kathy Martin, and our ecumenical partners in mission, especially the Anglican Church in Canada and their leaders. Open our eyes and hearts to welcome opportunities to work collaboratively in mission together in our neighbourhoods and communities, including with our fellow Christians who rent space downstairs: The Place Community Church.

Merciful God, we pray for the Lutheran Churches of British Columbia, and especially for our own congregation, Grace Lutheran Church. Send us Your Spirit, O God, so we will be motivated to be faithful in service in Your church, and for the love of the world. Lead and guide us in the coming weeks and months, as we consider what is the best way forward for our congregation. Enlighten us and help us to discern your will through caring consultation with our Synod.

Merciful God, we pray for those who are sick or recovering from illness or surgery, and all those in our congregation in need of our prayers ...

As we go about our daily lives, Lord Jesus, walk with us when we feel lost in the wilderness. Go before us as a companion on the way, serving as a beacon of hope and a guide to direct our steps. Lead us through all danger. Sustain us through all desolation. Comfort and strengthen us, and fill us with hope in your eternal

promise when we feel overwhelmed or grieve the current state of the world. Remind us daily that we are led and grounded in you, Lord Jesus Christ “in whom all things can be held together ... and in whom all things are reconciled”. And, finally, bring us home to the Promised Land you have prepared for us. In your holy name we pray.

**AMEN.**