

Pentecost 15: September 5/6, 2015

Called: Kingdom® Citizenship

[show sermon slide] We continue in our “Called” series this Labor Day weekend. Called by God, called to discipleship. Today we consider our call to the Kingdom, which is our call to citizenship.

Most of us don’t spend a great deal of time thinking about citizenship, whether it be in the United States or the Kingdom of God. It’s something we take for granted, at least until we travel to a foreign country. Like on my trip to Saltillo when we stopped for a bathroom break and I got a quick lesson in the difference between the “damas” and the “caballeros.” Let the record show that I don’t make it a practice of going into women’s restrooms! Yet back at home we rarely think about citizenship except maybe on the fourth of July when we say the pledge of allegiance.



Would it surprise you if I told you that Jesus speaks more about the kingdom of God than any other topic. The kingdom of heaven is like — treasure hidden in a field, a man who sowed good seed in his field, a merchant looking for fine pearls. We have a tendency to spiritualize these stories as if they relate to only “there and then,” not “here and now.” We can’t do that. The texts won’t allow it. Jesus knew what he was saying, and he said it very plainly. The kingdom of God has very practical implications. When Jesus calls us to faith he calls us into his kingdom. He calls us to live in this world as citizens of his kingdom while we earn a living, raise our families, and go about our lives.



We review our most regular reference to the Kingdom of God. *Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. The kingdom come...* What does this mean?

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So just what is the “kingdom of God”? It is “not of this world” as Jesus so eloquently told Pontius Pilate. So it is not a geo-political reality, like the United States or Israel. It is a kingdom of God’s authority. And that authority extends over all things, physical and spiritual, time and space.

1. The Kingdom of God is his rule and reign over all things physical in the extension of his *power*. He rules as king over the whole universe. *No, the world is not spinning out of control. Our lack of understanding does not negate his divine purpose.*
2. The kingdom is profoundly spiritual in his “God so loved the world.”

*And it shall come to pass that I will
pour out my Spirit on all flesh. I will
show wonders in the heavens.
Everyone who calls on the name of
the LORD shall be saved. --Joel 2*

This kingdom of *grace* is the Church. *Not the buildings, not the membership rolls. Rather, it consists of all “who call on the name of the LORD, as the prophet Joel tells us today.*

3. And the kingdom of God is eternal in *glory*, as God reigns triumphant over *the new heaven and new earth where all things are made new again* at the conclusion of this present age. The kingdom of God is his ruling authority over all things.



Jesus brings it home to where we live. His coming kingdom is firmly rooted in the gospel of grace. The kingdom is not something we achieve or earn or build or create or prepare through what we say or do. The kingdom is pure, sweet, unmerited and undeserved grace. “Have no fear little flock, for your Father has chosen to *give you* the

kingdom.” Yes, the kingdom is a gift; it’s free, no strings attached. It is the coming of his kingdom of grace that we pray for when we pray “Thy kingdom come,”



So what does the kingdom of God look like? As I said, it is not a geographical or political. It is not Washington or Jerusalem or Rome (although there are certainly citizens of the kingdom in all three). It is not a place at all. It is a person. It is Jesus. And it is all who recognize that *in* Jesus the kingdom of God has come near to us. It is both “already” and “not yet”. *Already* in that, when God pours out his Spirit upon us in the gift of faith, we possess the fullness of his grace in the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. And it is *not yet* in that we yet await a time when “the dwelling of God is with men.” In that day God “will make all things new” and that which once was described as “very good” will be restored to its former glory.

But receiving the kingdom into our lives is costly. The kingdom changes the way we live our lives; it changes the way we define our purpose; it changes the things we care about and worry about; it changes the way we relate to our neighbor. When Jesus calls us into his kingdom it is a call to live as citizens of the kingdom. What does citizenship look like? It is marked by four things in particular, modeled after our responsibilities as citizens of this country.



Citizens vote. As members of the Kingdom of God we speak up. What did Jesus tell the disciples as he sent them out two by two? “Say ‘*The kingdom of God has come near to you.*’” (Luke 10:9) The kingdom is marked by gracious speech. The gracious speech that comes from the mouth of God: *You are more loved than you can possibly imagine. Your sin is forgiven. Taste and see that the Lord is good.* And gracious kingdom speech is our response: *Welcome. How may I help? Have a good day. God bless you.* Kingdom speech is gracious speech.



Citizens obey the laws of the land. Kingdom members act. Gracious words are always accompanied by gracious acts. Jesus sent, and the disciples went. And as they went they spoke gracious words. They said “peace be to this house.” And then they

did gracious acts. They healed the sick. Kingdom members act. We act in concert in our Loved+Sent Servant Event. More often we act individually and in community groups. You deliver meals and visit the convalescing. You provide rides and volunteer time. You invite people into your homes and to Mary Poppins. Gracious acts. Kingdom members act.



Citizens pay taxes. Kingdom members are generous people. To be sure, as Jesus says, *the laborer deserves his wages*. But even more so, generosity is a mark of the kingdom. The kingdom of God comes near when you donate your time to sit with a grieving friend. Or when you mentor a student in studies, music or sports. When you support your church and other charities out of thankfulness for your material blessings. These are marks of the kingdom. They are counter-cultural and oblivious to the media. But they announce boldly to those with ears to hear, *The kingdom of God has come near to you*.



Citizens vote. They obey the law. They pay taxes. The fourth mark of citizenship is defense: When called upon they defend the country. Members of the kingdom of God count the cost. Jesus does not send us out without warning. *"I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves."* Whether we like it or not, we increasingly live in a post-Christian society. Moral absolutes of yesterday have become situational ethics today. In the process the Christian faith has become marginalized. Truly we are lambs among wolves. Jesus did not say this to discourage us. He just didn't want us to be naïve about the kingdom of this world. While we recognize the cost of discipleship, we also hold firmly to Jesus declaration, *Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world*.



So what sustains you when the strife is fierce, the warfare long?" When your call to the Kingdom is challenged at work, with your friends, maybe even in your home? In those moments, there "steals on the ear the distant triumph song." It is Jesus calling to you, *"Behold, I am making all things new."* His "not yet" kingdom of glory awaits, where wrongs will be righted and the last will be first. But it is "already" as well. Jesus has poured out his Spirit on you in Holy Baptism. You are called by him and have become a member of his kingdom. He's got your back. Have no fear. The Father has chosen to give you the kingdom. Amen.