

Proper 28 Sermon
The Rev. Megan Dembi

Though many of us may initially react with fear when we think of the end of this world, those who heard God's promise through the prophet Isaiah would have been comforted by these words—this promise that one day the world as we know it will end, and a new world, God's kingdom, will stand in its place. It is a promise that has comforted uncountable Jews and Christians over the centuries when they have experienced hate, violence, and oppression. Even those of us who live comfortable lives continue to have hope in this promise—the promise that one day all things will be as they should be. That one day, in God's kingdom, all will be glad and rejoice forever. That no one will weep or cry out in distress. There will be no infants that live but a few days and no old persons who do not live out a lifetime. Where no one will build only to have another inhabit, or plant vineyards only to have another eat the fruit. Where all who inhabit the kingdom will be blessed by God, and no one will hurt or destroy on all of the holy mountain that God has created. Yes, all Christians, no matter what our circumstances, have hope in this promise, and the assurance that we can trust in the Lord, our stronghold, our sure defense, and our savior.

Some hear this promise of God's kingdom and become complacent. They believe that, because God's kingdom will one day come, what happens in our world before then doesn't really matter—it doesn't matter that some suffer while others prosper, that some rejoice while others mourn, that some are in danger while others are safe, since all will be right in the end. And it's true that all things WILL be right in the end. But the expectation of God's kingdom to come is not given to us so that we might ignore the troubles and evils of this world. God did not bring us into a world that does not matter, where it doesn't matter how we think and act towards others.

Yes, God's promises offer us eternal comfort, no matter our circumstances, but they come with expectations of how we are to live in this life. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells us to not worry about the cares of this world, but to seek first the kingdom of God, the kingdom of God that we have been promised. But we are not only to seek out this kingdom, to hope for it's coming at some far-off and unknown time in the future. We are to also seek out God's righteousness. "But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness," Christ tells us. Our hope in God's coming kingdom is not an idle hope. We are not asked to passively await its coming. We are asked to seek out and carry out righteousness in the meantime.

It is tempting for us to try to pass this work off to others—to police officers, or governmental leaders, or business owners. We often believe it is up to the people in power to change this world for the better, to ensure that righteousness is carried out in this world. But I want to remind each and every one of us sitting here today of something. Who here has been baptized? Each one of us who has been baptized has been baptized into Christ's death and into Christ's eternal life. Each one of us who has been baptized has been marked as Christ's own forever. Each one of us who has been baptized has been sealed by the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who descended upon Christ at his own baptism, the same Spirit who was gifted to the apostles after the death of Christ, and the same Spirit who has moved through all of creation since before time began. If we're looking to the people with power to bring justice and righteousness to this world, we need look no further than the people here in this church, and the billions of people who share in Christ's eternal priesthood through the power and grace conferred onto us through our baptisms.

Yes, each and every one of us is expected to aid in the work of God's righteousness here in this world. And we need only look to God and God's kingdom to know what that righteousness is meant to look like. Whatever the circumstances of this life, whatever the promises in the next life, *that* is the higher calling to which each and every one of us is called—to bring about that righteousness, God's righteousness, into this world. We are to ask ourselves in dealing with others,

whether we are treating them as God would have them treated in his kingdom, as God would have *us* treat them. We are to ask ourselves if our thoughts, words, or actions are bringing pain to those around us, because when the righteousness of God rules, all are comforted. We are to ask ourselves whether we are building relationships with others or destroying them, if we are acknowledging each person as a child of God or discounting and disrespecting others because of our differences, because the kingdom of God is not a kingdom divided, but a kingdom for all.

It's often easy to forget this. It's so tempting to treat other people as "less than". To write off those who are different or who think differently from us. To stop caring about each other because of issues of race, or religion, or class, or gender, or anything else that threatens to alienate us from each other. But it is in these times that we must work even harder to bring the values of God's kingdom here on earth. And we know from our own experiences that we are able to come together in spite of our differences—that we are able to overcome what divides us when we remember what is more important.

I recently read a forum thread on a website called reddit where someone asked, "When have you immediately understood that you're witnessing a historical moment," and the events that people listed were mostly great tragedies. One person said their moment was when they were standing at a street corner on November 22, 1963, and a young boy on a bike stopped in front of nearby police officers to tell them the president was dead. Another person said it was when they watched the Challenger space shuttle launch with their parents, and how suddenly the shuttle seemed to explode, and they realized that wasn't normal when their mother burst into tears. Another said it was when school had suddenly and unexpectedly been dismissed early on September 11, 2001, and people from New Zealand, Canada, and other countries spoke up about how much that tragedy made an impact in their countries, and how close they felt to the people of the United States in that time. These events were all terrible tragedies, but we do not have to experience another tragedy to remember how we felt, how people were brought together and reminded that those things which seem to so irrevocably divide us are not as powerful as those things which bind us together. If in times of tragedy we can remember this, then we can also put this lesson to work in times of prosperity—in times of doubt and in times of certainty. We can remember from those moments how we were able to glimpse the kind of unity and love that God's kingdom will bring about.

We are assured that God's kingdom will one day come. And we are assured that those who wish to enter it will be judged as to whether they showed God's righteousness here in this world. We know what this righteousness that we are called to bring about looks like. We know that each one of us, each and every one of us, has been empowered through our baptisms and by the Holy Spirit to show forth this righteousness in our world. Let us go forth into the world and live into this holy calling. Amen.