

SERMON CHRIST'S EXPANSIVE PURPOSE.

As we do every week, we've just heard from one of the Gospels, which simply means 'good news'. The 4 Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are where the 'good news' of Jesus Christ is written down and chronicled.

The fundamental calling of our faith is that we proclaim and live this good news.

In today's reading from the book of Acts, we hear the now risen Christ, say this to His disciples, just before he departs them ... **"you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit, so that you will be my witnesses, and tell people about me throughout all the lands and to the ends of the earth."**

Which I think we'd all agree, is a pretty **expansive** mission purpose.

But it also raises a very interesting question, that goes right to very heart of this calling from Christ, which is this!

In a sentence, capture what you think is the good news for Jesus Christ?

For Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith, what do you think the 'good news' is?

Let's see what scripture tells us!

Today's reading book of **Acts Chapter 1** we read this ... **'Jesus appeared to his disciples over a period of 40 days and talked to them about... the Kingdom of God.'**

So, Christ, now resurrected, spends over a month time appearing to his disciples and he talks them about the 'kingdom of God'. Which is interesting, because when you go back to the very beginning of His ministry, straight after He leaves His testing in the wilderness, we read this in Mark's Gospel... **Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God by saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in this good news.**

Matthew 4:17 is very similar ... **Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."** By the way 'kingdom of God' and 'kingdom of heaven' is the same thing. Mathew writes for a mainly Jewish audience and they were more sensitive about saying God's name, so Matthew uses heaven instead.

And in **Luke's Gospel 4:43** We hear Jesus Himself saying... - **'I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose.'**

In **Luke 8:1** Just after choosing his disciples ... **Jesus went through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news - of the kingdom of God.**

Luke 9: verse 1 **Jesus called the twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority - sending them out to proclaim the kingdom of God.**

And in the **last chapter, last verse of the book of Acts** where St Paul is living out his final days in Rome, we read this... **For the next two years, Paul lived in Rome at his own expense. He welcomed all who visited him, boldly proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ.**

So, back to the original question.

In a sentence, what is the GOOD NEWS for Jesus, that he'd come to proclaim and live out?

Scripture tells us very clearly, it's about the Kingdom of God. **"For this purpose, said Jesus, I was sent."**

SO WHY DO I BEGIN THE WHOLE SERMON SERIES WITH THIS?

Because I would suggest that for many in the Christian faith, the understanding of this, is probably not as **expansive** as scripture shows us it needs to be. And if we miss the significance of this for Jesus, then we can miss the significance for our own lives and the role of the church. **If this is so central for Jesus – then what does this ask of us?**

Well in order to answer that question we need to ask this question

What is the kingdom of God and why is it so important for Jesus Christ.

Put very simply... The Kingdom of God is when God's 'will' and God's 'way' reigns supreme here on earth as in the heavenly realm. The will of God is being lived out the way God would want it to be. It's not so much a *place* but a way of life being lived out and manifested, and we do this through the attitudes of our hearts and the actions of our lives.

In other words, we become the answer to the Lord's prayer that we say every single week in Holy Communion. **"Let Your Kingdom come, let Your will be done here on earth as it is in heaven"**

Now there's a good reason why I believe we need to make this good news of the Kingdom as central as Jesus makes it.

One of the core reasons so many are failing to engage with Christianity today, is because they don't think it's got anything of relevance to offer them, in terms of real transformation and hope. Whether we agree with this perspective or not, it's the reality of our challenge.

I was chatting the other day with Wilson our Youth Minister and we were talking about the sense of hopelessness and cynicism that seems to be around in many people and he sees it of course in younger people. 2 of the big manifestations of this loss of hope, is the mental health crisis and escalating suicide numbers.

Now the reasons for this are complex, but the environmental crisis - disillusion with political systems – disillusion in general with big institutions (including organised religion) – fragmented community and the increasing social divide, all contribute.

But we both agreed, that this why we passionately believe the 'good news' of the Kingdom is so important to communicate. Because at its core, it's about transformation and hope. It offers the hope of a cause and a purpose - bigger than our selves.

When you listen to Jesus teach, it's really clear that not only does the Kingdom of God, have an **'eternal significance'** ... it also has a **'here and now'** significance. **Right here, right now, really does matter.** As Jesus said, the Kingdom is near, it's here, it's within you it's all around.

The Kingdom of God isn't just about the afterlife and eternity – it's about transformation and hope in the here and now. **Our salvation isn't just about US getting into heaven - it's about heaven getting into US.**

John Ortberg, the guy who wrote the book *"If you want to walk on water get out of the boat"* has a great phrase that captures this. He said ... **'Eternity is now in session'** ...



And the truly exciting part, is that Jesus said the Kingdom is like a banquet. Everyone is invited to join in.

I want to show an example of this Kingdom transformation bringing hope in the here and now.



Shane Claiborne, is a Christian, doing intentional community living in a tough neighbourhood in Philadelphia. He told us an inspirational story of what Kingdom transformation and hope looks like based on our O/T reading from today. And here's a video clip where he shares this story.

VIDEO CLIP <https://youtu.be/-WcfU3KLMeU>

On the night, he told a very moving story of how one mother who lost her teenage son to a shooting, was beating the melted iron of the very gun that killed her son. As she beat the melted iron, changing it from the shape of death to the shape of life, she was weeping and crying out ... "this is for my son - this is for my son... and I pray that no more children will die from instruments of death."

For me, this is what 'eternity, now in session' looks like.

The reality of life, is that everyone single one of us, spends every single day of our lives, existing in a 'kingdom' of one sort or another. And all these earthly kingdoms, have a way and a truth, that operates.

We have our family kingdoms, school, university and workplace kingdoms. There are Business and Economic kingdoms. Medical and Academic kingdoms. Military kingdoms. Political & Justice kingdoms. And the most recent of all the kingdoms ... the kingdom of the Internet.

So, there's no arena of our lives, where we're not involved in a kingdom of some kind.

As followers of Jesus, the choice before us, is which kingdom way and truth do we mostly seek to serve? Jesus of course makes it pretty clear in Matthew 6:33 that we called to **"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God. Seek to live righteously**, said Jesus.

Meaning, seek to live nobly with integrity. Seek to live in the ways that are just and right. Seek to live with the Kingdom attitudes of kindness, compassion, mercy and a servant- heart, at the centre of our lives. Live as if **'eternity is now in session'**... just like Jesus did.

At the epi-centre of our faith is the belief that in the person of Jesus Christ, the truth of God's Kingdom way, invaded earth. I AM, the way and the truth that brings Life.

Through His life, death, resurrection and sending of the Holy Spirit, Jesus demonstrates the kingdom - redeems the kingdom - and empowers the Kingdom here on earth.

As Tom Wright so brilliantly puts it ... **"The resurrection completes the inauguration of God's kingdom. It is the decisive event demonstrating that God's kingdom really has been launched on earth as it is in heaven."**

So as you and I aspire to make this Kingdom hope, real and a practical living out in our own lives ... the question we always need to ask is ... **what did it look like for Jesus?**

As I look at scripture and Jesus, here are some reflections on what I see.

- **I see the good news of Kingdom, when people are 'Breaking down Barriers and Building Bridges.'**

Every time the dividing walls of hostility are broken down and people reach out across our tribal divides in the spirit of reconciliation ... the kingdom is breaking in.

Every time someone is on the receiving end of violence and hatred but responds with the way of forgiveness and peace, as Christ did on the Cross for all humanity, the kingdom is breaking in. And we've seen this in both Christchurch and Sri Lanka.

- **'Practising Kindness and Compassion'**

Every time we participate in acts of kindness and compassion, that brings nobility and dignity to another human being, - or to God's creatures or to God's created order, the kingdom is breaking in. Have you ever been on the receiving end of an act of kindness and compassion and **not** felt the presence of God?

- **The ministry of 'Wounded Healers'**

Every time we restore and redeem anything that is broken, hurt or wounded through the power of love... and every time we feed the hungry, tend the sick, bring water to the thirsty, show hospitality to the stranger (whoever the stranger may be) clothe the poor and visit the prisoner ... the Kingdom is breaking in. The resurrected Christ still bore his wounds but now heralded hope.

- **'Redemptive Entrepreneurs'**

Every time a business practise or venture, is motivated by a desire to serve humankind and operates with Gospel integrity and ethics - And every time **we** support and encourage these ethical business's, the Kingdom is breaking in.

- **Contemplative Living**

Every time we live fully present and engaged in **'the sacrament of the present moment'**... Be it savouring the beauty of God's creation, sacred mealtimes with loved ones, lost in a creative process and passion - or just celebrating the gift of community... we are glimpsing the Kingdom.

- **Swords to Plowshares**

We live in a world where we spend more money on building weapons and trading weapons of destruction than education and the eradication of poverty. So, every time we choose the ways of peace and life over the idolatry of war and death, we shine the light of the kingdom into darkness.

All of these are expressions of the Kingdom and must surely be pleasing to God?
All of these are gateways to the eternal. And all of these are 'Eternity now in session'.

I want begin to close, with our verse for the day.

In **Matthew 28:18** we read this ... **Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given *all* authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make **disciples** of **all** the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey **all** the commands I have given you.**

Notice again the use of the word 'ALL'.

Jesus has been given ***all*** authority in heaven and on earth.

He tells the disciples to "go and make disciples of ***all*** the nations."

And then He tells them ... "teach these new disciples to obey ***all*** the commands I have given you".

The expansive mission purpose of Jesus now in session.

Notice that Christ doesn't tell the disciples to go and make *theological academics* of all nations.

He doesn't tell the disciples, to go out and make *religious denominations* of all the nations.

He doesn't even say, go and make '*believers*' of all nations!

He tells the disciples to go and make ***disciples*** of all nations.

WHY?

Because what Jesus really wants, is people who will follow Him and live out His commandments.

People who will seek first Kingdom of God and commit to living His way and His truth!

Jesus, wants disciples.

Because this is HOW we make the Kingdom come, here on earth as it is in heaven.

AMEN

For a time of Reflection, I've put together a power-point ... to a beautiful song by Lauren Daigle, called **Salt and Light**.

Images, that I believe capture some of the Kingdom themes of hope, that we can all express in our everyday humanity. Kingdom Expressions that would be pleasing to God.