

Sunday, October 17, 2021

Grace and Peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen

As you may or may not know Luther wrote a great deal. He wrote letters. He wrote theses. He wrote lectures, sermons and dissertations of all sorts. He wrote curriculum and of course he wrote as he translated the Bible into German. It might seem that he had little time for anything else. From a piece entitled “The Freedom of a Christian,” he writes this: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”

And in his treatise “Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed,” Luther even says that “true Christians...do injustice to no one” so that they have “no need for benefits of prince, king, lord, sword, or law.” And though Luther realized that such “rule” would be impractical, it is telling that he at least thought it possible – even if only in theory.

From just these writings of Luther and our texts today, especially our gospel text, I believe that it is clear that when we speak about God’s Kingdom on earth we are talking about a radical alternative life and lifestyle that is practiced by so many people today.

Now that is not a new thought. It’s been lived out for millennia. As we read the Old and New Testaments, we can easily see that God and later God through Christ offer ways of living in community that are diametrically opposed to the status quo.

Perhaps that difference escaped James and John as they asked Jesus a question that might work well in life at that time, but apparently missed Jesus’ primary thoughts and teachings of what the Kingdom is all about.

The Kingdom of God in some ways is the opposite of the way folks were used to living for centuries. James and John ask a question that might be better suited for an earthly king with an earthly kingdom.

Jesus immediately assured James and John and the other disciples within hearing range that God’s heavenly Kingdom will be radically different than earthly kingdoms.

I think that this point comes to a climax as Jesus says, “But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

That’s certainly not the norm, not the status quo. That’s not how things work in the everyday world of the disciples, and it certainly is not how it works in our world today.

Yet, while that is not the norm, it is the life you and I have been called to through our baptism.

If we were infants when we were baptized our parents made promises on our behalf. Later, as we were Confirmed or moved from one congregation to another, we made promises as part of the Affirmation of Baptism service.

Currently in the ELW that promise is made with a positive response to this long question: “Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy Baptism – to live among God’s faithful people, to hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?”

If that’s not an alternative way of life, I don’t know what is.

When I came upon the words – “to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth,” I stopped for a moment. I immediately thought of the political mess in Washington, D.C. and Harrisburg and state legislatures across our nation. The political climate today across the board is a rabbit hole that we dare not start down. It is fraught with partisan hypocrisy that leads to inactivity on a scale that we haven’t witnessed before. And unfortunately there does not seem to be a way forward that leads us out of this quagmire any time soon.

The end result of all this partisan wrangling is that those of us who elected these legislators are not getting what we had hoped when we filled in our ballot and submitted it. We’ve been short changed. And now we are stuck with what we cannot easily change. It is so disheartening that we can feel ashamed of all that is politics today.

So much for that major part of our life together. And even though we might not follow politics closely, all that is taking place affects us and our families and future generations.

Enter Jesus with a new, a really radical notion of how we ought to live together: “whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.” It appears that politicians would certainly come to full bipartisan agreement that those words of Jesus do not apply to them.

But what about us, you and me? Does that statement influence us? Does it stop us in our tracks and cause us to rethink how we live among others? Do we wonder to what extent we are caught up in the status quo? Do we get an inkling of how different Jesus’ teachings really and truly are and how we might be more on board?

In one sense, it’s not a choice. We have made promises to our God at our Baptism or Confirmation or at other times. Are we ready to throw the towel in? Are we ready to say to God that his way is too hard, that it may be okay for some folks but not for us?

Are we ready to say that we made a mistake when we made those promises? I can’t ever think that God has believed that he made the wrong choices when he gave us all the promises we receive from him. Can you?

Fortunately for you and for me, no one ever said that it was going to be easy. No one. Ever. We are simply called to live a Christ-like life. We know that comes with inherent difficulties, and plenty of them. We might be rejected, mocked, laughed at, persecuted or worse.

But we also offer the only hope our world has. And right now our world needs a Savior as it does in each and every age and generation. If we do not show Christ to others, who will? If we do not live a Christ-like life in defiance of what the status quo would have us follow, who will? If we do not show and live out justice, peace, mercy, forgiveness, grace, and love, who will?

And truthfully, as daunting as living a Christ-like life is, we may from time to time allow ourselves the luxury of thinking about God's heavenly Kingdom, not that we might sit at God's right or left hand, but to more and more understand and appreciate the peace, harmony and love that it will bring to us for all eternity.

But then, inevitably, we must return to life right now, to the real world. There is an old saying that slow and steady wins the race. We're not likely to change the world or any part of it overnight, but together we most certainly have a chance of changing those closest to us, those with whom we interact regularly, those who are open to a lifestyle, a way of viewing the world, that is truly revolutionary.

And I believe it is critical that as we attempt to live a Christ-like life that we understand and appreciate that we are never ever alone. God is with us always, giving us the words to say, giving us the stamina we need, giving us all we need daily through his gracious and loving Holy Spirit.

Thanks be to God. Amen