

Pressing On Toward the Kingdom

A British scientist was in Dublin for a conference. He arrived late at the station so he threw himself into a taxi and called out to the driver. “Drive fast.” Away the taxi went over the cobblestone streets of Dublin until at last the scientist called up to the driver, “Do you know where you’re going?” “No,” the driver replied, “but I’m driving fast.” (Rev. Dr. James D. Kegel)

Sometimes it feels like the whole world is speeding along without knowing where they’re going. I think Covid 19 revealed to many of us that “speeding” is not all it’s cracked up to be. A quiet peaceful place with a good book and some cold lemonade or maybe a cup of coffee is much more appealing now a days. I’m sure Jesus would have liked a quiet ride on the boat across the Sea of Galilee or a soft spot of grass under an olive tree once in a while.

Today’s gospel lesson is far away from that image. Jesus has entered the Temple in Jerusalem maybe looking for a place to pray. After all, it was just a short time ago when he had thrown out the food trucks, the pop-up gift shops, and money changers saying, “My father’s house is a house of prayer.” But, he finds instead the priests and elders squirming like modern-day paparazzi trying to be the next one he looks to for a question.

When they question his authority for preaching and teaching and healing, he begins telling parables – short stories with a definite point to them, usually using places and things that the average person will know and understand. Even then, some don't quite "get" it. So he makes it as clear as possible. "Therefore, I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces fruit for the kingdom. The one that falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls. The powers that be suddenly realized he was referring to them and they wanted to arrest him but were afraid of the crowds.

Now I have to admit it is really tempting to hold the priests and elders in contempt for all the mistakes they made in their ministry to Israel. They are so proud of their titles and robes with the fancy jewels and ropes hanging on them. They love the honor and deference they are given by the people. Why would they want to change anything? Everything seems fine to them except this rabble rouser who is going out of his way to stir up trouble. Jesus promises God's kingdom here on earth if people just follow him instead of their current leaders.

We today need to slow down and take a hard look at ourselves. What are our goals in life? What are we willing to do to achieve those goals? Many of us say we want to follow Jesus but, if we're honest, we've gotten caught

up in other ambitious goals – like status, financial wealth, titles both in and out of the church, and, yes, being king or queen of our own little kingdom. Power whenever and wherever we can find it.

“Wait a minute,” you say. “I try to live within my means, give to charities whenever I can, and read my Bible every day. Doesn’t that count for something?!”

The original followers of Jesus didn’t have wealth or power. They were humble fishermen and homemakers. Farmers and shop keepers. Why should we expect more? Jesus expects obedience to the will of God revealed in the words he preaches. Sometimes, following Jesus results in humble surroundings and suffering for the cause.

Jesus died on the cross around 33 AD Paul took up his mission to spread the gospel to the gentiles a short time later. It is believed that he died in Rome around 63-63 AD. So for approximately 30 years, Paul reminded the people that the kingdom of God was possible here on this earth IF we followed Jesus and not all the things this world use to tempt us. He reminds them and us that we need to set a GOAL - God’s kingdom on earth. To attain our goal, we must have a plan and a persistence to stick to the plan.

The Ultimate prize in achieving our goal is eternal life with all the saints who follow Jesus. While we are reaching to the goad of God's kingdom, we are running a race says Paul. Have you ever run in a relay race. The idea is that a team sends its runners one at a time. The first runner passes a baton to the second runner who then runs until the third runner appears to receive the baton. . . and so on until the last runner crosses the finish line. One of the tips for winning this race, and many other races, is to keep your eyes on the finish line (prize, goal). If you look back or around at the other runners, you lose focus and time. So Paul admonishes us to "Press on toward the kingdom" That's where the real prize is. And when we do keep pressing on, we will find the joy and satisfaction of a job well done as Jesus receives us into his arms at the finish line. Praise be to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

The Ten Commandments

20 And God spoke all these words:

2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

3 "You shall have no other gods before^[a] me.

4 "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

7 "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

8 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. **9** Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

12 "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

13 "You shall not murder.

14 "You shall not commit adultery.

15 "You shall not steal.

16 "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

¹⁸ When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance ¹⁹ and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."

²⁰ Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

Philippians 3:4-14 New International Version

^{4b}If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

⁷ But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in ^[a] Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

The Parable of the Tenants

³³ “Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. ³⁴ When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

³⁵ “The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶ Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷ Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.

³⁸ “But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ ³⁹ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

⁴⁰ “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”

⁴¹ “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

⁴² Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

“The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes’^[a]?

⁴³ “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. ⁴⁴

Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”^[b]

⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. ⁴⁶ They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.