

“We are members of God’s kingdom” - The Readings for today.

This morning our meditation is taken from the three readings of today, which are found in Malachi, Luke and Colossians. Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Friends in Christ; a book on church outreach and evangelism was published not too long ago, with the premise that people outside the Church do not really care what is truth or not – they simply want to know: “Does it work?” And not “is it true?” So, this book goes on to say that, this should be the basis of the Church’s evangelism and outreach. The authors say “we should not try to convince people that Christianity is true, but that it works, it delivers. It will give people what they are looking for. If they need success or money they will find it as soon they come to the church. If they want to avoid tribulation or sickness come to the church and they will stay away from those problems.

Well, all I can say to that is: Have these people read the book of Malachi? If not, they should! For from that prophet today, we heard exactly the opposite message. The people were complaining that God was not working. Their worship and devotion were not working. God was not delivering. They were not getting what they were looking for. For look, they said! “It is vain to serve God. What is the profit? They said: the arrogant is blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.” It does not work, all this Temple and sacrifice stuff. It does not work, our prayers and good deeds. It does not work, Malachi, prophet of “God.” Why should we stay? Why should we bother?

No doubt you recognize some of these questions. Not only from people you know, but also from us from time to time. What difference does it make whether or not I repent today? Or if I sleep in and skip church because I do not feel like it? Or perhaps because there is another important thing than to come to worship the Lord. Why bother to do good and help my neighbor, attend Bible study, read God’s Word, or pray? The world goes on. My loved ones still leave, or die. I still have my struggles at work, or school or at home. My life is still a mess. And besides all that, look! All these people who are selfish, and never go to church, never attend a Bible Study and never pray – they are happy and rich and care free! So why should we bother, pastor? Why should we stay? It does not really make a difference. It’s not working. So what should we say? Does it work? Does it make a difference?

Friends, these are important questions. That go to the heart of the matter of faith and the Church. And the answers? Well, they depend on what kind of kingdom we are looking for. If we are looking for a kingdom here on earth, of riches and power, of wealth and glory, then a King reigning from a cross and not jumping down in power is probably not going to work for us. If we are looking for a kingdom where we are admired and affirmed, and where we are told that we are basically good and okay – do not change a thing in your life! – then the Law of God and its message of sin and repentance is probably not going to work for us. If we are looking for a kingdom where we are initiated into the halls of power and influence, and where our thoughts and wisdom are trumpeted and revered, then a Baptism into a new life as a child of God is probably not going to work for us.

If we are looking for a kingdom where we are king, and our every wish and desire is granted, we are not suffering, and our life is filled with only luxury and ease, then a Supper of body and blood and forgiveness of sins is probably not going to work for us. If we are looking for a kingdom where everyone gets what they deserve and what they got coming, then a King who is merciful and gracious and comes to die for His enemies – and even prays for their forgiveness while He is being executed by them! – is probably not going to work for us. And so if our kingdom is the kingdom of ME, then no, this King is not going to work for us. We are going to be disappointed. For this King has different designs,

different ideas, different goals than us and our kingdom, which is good. For look at ourselves and our kingdom – is it really that great? Or is it not passing away? When we think we are on top, someone else comes along. If we are being praised one day, it is someone else the next. One day we are healthy, the next day we are flat on our back. One day we feel we can do everything, the next day we are confused, and there is doubt in our hearts about our faith. The people and things we thought we could count on let us down, not once but plenty of times. We thought things would be different, and no matter how hard we try.

Friends, there is something more friends. A better kingdom. A lasting kingdom. With a real King. A King of kings. A kingdom not just of this little world (or my part of it!), but of all worlds. A kingdom of right, not wrong; of peace, not strife; of life, not death. A kingdom where hope does not eventually run out, but where hope is fulfilled. A kingdom where that which defeats us is itself defeated! A kingdom of truth. You know, brothers and sisters in Christ, that there is! That's why we are here at this place. To repent of ourselves and our own kingdom building, and receive that which is greater. To repent of listening to the lies of Satan, and instead have our ears and eyes and mouths and hearts filled with the truth. Filled with the One who not only speaks the truth, but is the truth.

The King who reigned from the cross, not because He was weak – but because He was strong enough to stay. That He be not only the King of kings, but that He be our King. For that is what He wants most of all. Us. To give us life. To give us Himself. And so He has! For as we heard from the Apostle Paul: “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Or in other words, He has transferred us from our own kingdoms of darkness and death, and into His kingdom of light and life.

A past tense transfer that continues to take place every time He transfers our sins from us to Himself. In Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord Supper, transferring our sins to Himself, bestowing His forgiveness and life to us, and making us citizens of a kingdom which has no end. A Kingdom where I am not king, and that is good! For there is a better King, who is on the throne not for Himself, but FOR ME. And this kingdom, “Does it work?” It works because it is true. Yes, because God really did come and die for us. Yes, in Jesus, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. Yes, in His death and resurrection, Jesus defeated our enemies and reconciled us to the Father. Yes, in Him, we are now what we were not before – sons and daughters of God, citizens of a new kingdom, and heirs of the promise of eternal life.

How do we know? Because those words spoken by Jesus from the cross – words of forgiveness and the promise of paradise – were spoken not just to others, but here, to us. No matter how old, no matter how young. For as our sins put Jesus on the cross, so His words of forgiveness spoken for those who put Him there are for us.

But what about the thief on the cross next to Jesus? And you know friends, that thief is us. That's the due reward of our deeds. That's how our kingdom's going to wind up – in a bloody mess! Unless...unless we are remembered by the King. And then our blood does not have the final word – His does. His blood which speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Heb 12:24) His blood which is shed for us for the forgiveness of our sins. His blood which is poured over our lips, and with it given to us the promise of paradise. Yes, “Today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Maybe not this 24 hour day called Sunday, November 20th – but the Today in which our Lord lives. The Today which has no end. For here, the light is breaking into the darkness. Here, His kingdom is breaking down our kingdoms. Here, we join the angels and archangels and all the company of Heaven. One Church, One King, One truth. And with this truth and kingdom, we have all that we need. We have peace to face those problems, and trials that appear in our life, and even death. We have

contentment, with much or with little. We have purpose and meaning in life. We have forgiveness for all our past mistakes and shortcomings, doubts and guilt. And even forgiveness for those sins we have not done yet. We have hope in the midst of suffering, and in a future which has no end.

And as another Church Year has come to its close, we rejoice in this, as we have rejoiced all the year – in our King, in His work, and in His Kingdom. We rejoice in His forgiveness and life, in His mercy and love. We rejoice that He does not give us what we deserve, but the gifts we do not. We rejoice in His truth, for this is the truth that works. The Truth that has come, and is coming again, to set us free. (John 8:36) Amen