

No More Night

Revelation 21:10, 22 – 22:5; John 14:23-29

Lewinsville Presbyterian Church

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The good news of the gospel is that *the kingdom of God is at hand*. This is the first thing Jesus talks about in the Gospel of Mark, and the in-breaking of the kingdom of God is the heart of what he talks about for the rest of the story. The kingdom of God is at hand, Jesus says, so people are invited to repent, reorient, and rearrange our lives accordingly. We are invited to believe that, in the midst of all of the terrifying, swaggering, bullying, violent kingdoms of the world, the kingdom of God is at hand. The kingdom of justice, mercy, truth, forgiveness, hospitality, light, hope, and love is at hand.

Because God's kingdom of mercy and grace is at hand, we are being summoned to live our lives according to that kingdom, instead of whatever kingdom is trying to threaten or scare us. Because if Jesus was right that the God's kingdom of mercy and grace is at hand, then that means that we do not need to hoard resources out of fear, but can share our resources and our lives with the poor, because our Father in heaven will provide us enough. That means we do not need to work endlessly and frantically to prove our value, because our value does not come from our productivity but from our being beloved by God. That means that we won't associate only with people who look like us, think like us, eat like us, vote like us, but that we will include and welcome those who are outcast and despised by society; we don't need to keep them out, because God welcomes all, strangers and friends. It means that we can insist on public responses to wrongdoing other than raw vengeance. And on and on. We can reorganize our lives according to the guidelines of the kingdom of God.

And if it seems hard or foolish to believe that the kingdom of God is at hand here in 2022, with all of our turbulence and challenges, rest assured that it was no easier for Jesus' first hearers to believe it in the context of the occupying armies of the Roman empire.

The kingdom of God is at hand, it has been inaugurated and sealed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, so we don't need to live our lives with fear. That's the core of the Easter message. We can lean into all of the hard situations in our lives – whether those hard situations are at home, at work, at church, in our society, or in the world – we can lean into the sharp points, as one spiritual teacher puts it, in faith that God's kingdom is at hand, and God will get everything God wants.

Our two texts today show us this, in ways that draw our attention both to the future when all of God's promises will be fulfilled, and to the present, when pain and distress and conflict are very much present.

Revelation 22 – and you do realize that we have now read from Revelation on two consecutive Sundays here at Lewinsville – is a vision of the great heavenly city come to earth; God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven. It is a spectacular, jaw-dropping vision of beauty, coherence, international goodwill and healing, endless hospitality and welcome – the text says the gates of the city will never be shut by day, and there will be no night. That means that the gates of this city will always be open. There will be no security forces patrolling the streets, looking for people who don't belong, because nothing unclean or false will enter there. And before we think this means that "those people" won't be there – whoever we might happen to think are unclean – we should realize that this means that our own unclean, false parts will have all been purged, healed, forgiven, redeemed, and transformed to the good and the true. That's why it says that the leaves of the tree of life are for the "healing of the nations." "There will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light." Everything about our lives and our society and our world that has been hidden or concealed or covered up will be brought and exposed to God's glorious light. Now if that sort of exposure of everything that we have tried to keep secret makes us nervous, because we've got some things we'd like to keep hidden into eternity, we are invited to trust that the Lord God is not only a God of justice and accountability, but also the God of mercy and redemption, and we do not need to be afraid.

The kingdom of God is at hand, friends. We're invited to believe this good news and reorient our lives accordingly.

"Well, that's fine for the future, Scott," you might say. "But right now, I don't know if you've noticed, but we've got a lot of problems. Do not try to tell me that everything is fine. The kingdom of God has not yet come in its fullness. Don't try to mollify me with pie in the sky, bye and bye."

Which is exactly on target. The kingdom of God has not yet come in its fullness. Jesus said that the kingdom is *at hand*. It's not here in fullness yet, but it is coming. The resurrection of Jesus is the assurance of how the story will end for everyone. And we are invited to begin living our lives today on that basis. We are invited to begin reorganizing our lives – how we spend our money, how we treat our neighbors, how we treat our enemies, how we relate to the earth, by taking the Sabbath each week, by confessing our sins and forgiving others for theirs – we are invited to begin living our lives now, on the basis of the kingdom of God as it will be. That is what is called 'living in faith.'

In John 14, Jesus is in the midst of giving his disciples his farewell instructions. In just a little bit, Jesus will be arrested, tried, and executed. So from every normal

perspective, it looks like the brutal kingdoms of the world have won. In the midst of that terror and that threat, Jesus says to his disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

Remember, Jesus' gift of peace does not mean all of our problems have been solved. He's about to be executed. Jesus' gift of peace means that the powers of death never have the final say in God's kingdom. The powers of death can cause a lot of hurt, but they no longer control us. Jesus is inviting his disciples to begin living their lives now, on the basis of the kingdom that will come in Revelation 22. Jesus is inviting his disciples to live with the peace and joy and neighborly hospitality and love that will abound in the heavenly city. We do not need to wait for Jesus to return in order to live like that today.

A couple of weeks ago, I had the privilege of attending a gathering at National Presbyterian Church in DC where two authors, Bishop Claude Alexander and Dr. Mac Pier, were speaking about their recent book entitled, *Required: God's Mercy to Justice, Mercy, and Humility to Overcome Racial Division*. The attendees that evening were a racially diverse mix of Christian leaders from across the DMV. Bishop Alexander is Black, and Dr. Pier is White, and they got to know each other at the Lausanne Global Leaders' Summit in Bangalore, India, a church missions conference whose origins go back to Billy Graham. They were issuing a call to the church, which is all too divided along racial lines, to come together. They said that 'a divided church cannot speak to a divided society.'

What was striking to me, in light of our two texts today, is that the evening was not a somber or heavy evening, in spite of the fact that we were there to talk about racism. There was energy in the room, there was joy in the room, there was a deep sense of peace in the room. Working to overcome racial hostility and division, Bishop Alexander told us, was an issue of discipleship for the church. Over the years, they said that they had heard from people who said that they weren't around when slavery started, so it wasn't fair to blame them for the existence of racism. Bishop Alexander and Dr. Pier said, "The racial divide is not our fault; but it is our problem." Dr. David Renwick, pastor of National Presbyterian, said of Bishop Alexander and Dr. Pier, that "they are passionate, not about assigning blame, but about mobilizing people to take action, believing that, as a church, we Christians have more responsibility from God to be solvers of our problems than we think."

The kingdom of God is at hand, friends. It is a kingdom of healing, a kingdom of neighborliness, a kingdom of generosity towards the poor, it is a wildly diverse kingdom of people from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages. We are summoned to begin reorienting and reorganizing our lives today accordingly.

When you look at your life, what is one area of your life that is not being lived according to the priorities of the kingdom of God? If you're like me, there may be a laundry list of areas. Just pick one. What is one area of your life in which you are aware

that you are not living as you would if you really believed that God's gracious and joyful reign, where there is no more night, was at hand? When you have identified an area, then pray to God to lead you to begin moving towards God's desire for you. God will be faithful to help you. To God and to God alone, be all the glory. Amen.