

Title: Our Core Values: We Are Kingdom People
Scripture: Matthew 13:24-33 p. 14. “the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed ... when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree ...”
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Paul F. Soderquist, Interim Pastor
First Presbyterian Church, Brighton, Colorado

He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ ²⁸He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ ²⁹But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’” ³¹He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³²it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” ³³He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

A Sunday School teacher asked the students, “What do we know about God?” One student said, “God’s an artist.” How do we know that, asked the teacher. Said the student, “You know. Our Father, who does art in heaven, hallowed by thy name ...”

OK we are concluding today a sermon series on the Great Ends of the Church. As we’ve done before, please read aloud with me from the

inside of your bulletin this statement from the Presbyterian Constitution about the Great Ends of the Church. Read with me now:

The Great Ends of the Church are:

The proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind.

The shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God.

The maintenance of divine worship.

The preservation of the truth.

The promotion of social righteousness. and

The exhibition of the kingdom of heaven to the world.¹

What's this world coming to?

Out of the St. Petersburg Times, a Florida man feigned drowning and when people came to help he threw jellyfish at them. Why would someone fake drowning and then throw jellyfish at the rescuers? What's this world coming to?

A delivery truck driver was proclaimed Denver's Champion Parking Violator a couple years ago, racking up 196 tickets totaling around \$5,700 in fines. I always thought delivery trucks were sort of exempt from parking tickets. What's this world coming to?

Three men robbed an Ohio couple in their home, but then one of the robbers, a 20 year old man, returned to the scene of the crime to ask the victim for a date. Like, she would say yes? What's this world coming to?

The witness of the Christian faith affirms that what this world is coming to is very simply the kingdom of heaven. Jesus taught disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come ..." We witness to a coming kingdom of heaven. Not only is it coming, but it has already begun to emerge, we are called to it in the life and ministry of Jesus, we are invited and commanded to align ourselves with it, and even to help it take shape and bear fruit.

¹ From Book of Order, G-1.0200

Jesus preached, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field ...” After the sowing, the planting, of the seed, then what happened? Weeds grew in the field, threatening the good wheat. The kingdom of God can be challenged.

The kingdom of heaven is definable. You can smell it. Sweet. You can touch it. It’s different from a weed. It’s a friendly handshake, a loving outstretched hand from a neighbor.

Faith starts out small, possibly when you’re very young. The tiny seed of the kingdom grows and becomes the greatest of trees. It spans a lifetime.

Tim Tebow told his faith story recently, written in the Denver Post, that as a boy he went to his father and said he was ready to take Jesus into his heart. But his father was off-putting and wouldn’t go there with Tim. He went to his mother and said he was ready to receive Jesus into his heart, but his father wouldn’t help him. His mother did. Now it’s all a part of his story of faith.

You have a story of faith. And you are part of something much, much greater than yourself. Faith planted in your heart by the gospel is growing. But there may be weeds in the crop. What are those?

Jesus preached: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

What is it about yeast? All it takes is a little active yeast to make quite a bit of dough rise. A little impacts a lot. **You** can be and are that little bit of yeast. You can make a big impact, one day at a time, one conversation at a time, one decision at a time. We don’t really need more faith. We just need to apply the faith we already have.

A pastor in Sun City told me a man in his congregation was asked if he would volunteer with something at church. And the man's response was, "No, I'm retired from God." There's something flat in that. We don't want to live flat lives. Even though we may retire from work, we don't retire from God.

Last Sunday I told how John Calvin in 16th century Geneva went to work to improve the city's well being, advocating for cooking stoves in the common household, and advocating for a sanitary sewer system in the city to raise the health and hygiene of the community. Imagine if we here in and around Brighton and Denver didn't have a sanitary sewer system. That would be unpleasant and unsanitary. John Calvin gave us the great insight that ...

- faith and faithfulness are inseparable;
- theology and ethics are bound together as one;
- concern for the welfare of the city is not optional for the church.²

What more is there for Brighton and the surrounding community? Where do things still need to improve? Much has been done by faithful people in years past, and in the present. What more needs improving?

The call of Jesus on our lives is real and it means things that translate to our behavior, our actions, our mind-set, and our aspirations.

Very, very simply, God has high expectations of you and me. The highest. Perhaps not in a perfectionistic way but in an aspirational way. Jesus said "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."³ There's our aspiration. God is a good God and wants good things for you and expects good things from you. God sets limits on you because those same limits are also good for society as a whole. America is the land of

² From powerpoint presentation, The Great Ends of the Church (Presbyterian Church U.S.A.)

³ Matthew 5:48

the free. But American freedom is not freedom to do anything you want. The freedom you have to extend your fist stops at your neighbor's nose.

The great Michaelangelo was a fantastic artist in the 15th and 16th centuries. Michaelangelo's statue of the Angel stands in the Bologna, Italy Basilica of San Domenico. Michelangelo was asked how he carved that. And he said he carved and carved in the marble until the angel within was set free.

What of this congregation? What is being carved out, in order to be set free? What more does God have for us? What needs to change? What needs to die in order that something else might live?

In today's banner, for the sixth Great End of the Church, the symbolism is a dove in flight over the earth, carrying an olive branch, echoing Gen. 6:11: "And lo, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth." In the artwork, a golden arch represents the dawning of God's kingdom.⁴

Church is a community and there are high standards for the community. Not in an elitist way but in a serving kind of way, to serve others even in a radical way, a "God's kingdom" kind of way. Jesus said there is no greater love than to give your life for your friends. If your friends and family don't notice any difference between you and someone else who is not of faith, what does that say? Shouldn't there be a difference?

There was a mostly Caucasian mainline Protestant church located in an urban downtown. I think it was Kansas City. Once their pews were filled with worshippers, but slowly over the years the people moved away and the congregation went into decline. As the Caucasian congregation shrank, a local ethnic population grew. In time, a miracle happened. The mainline Protestant congregation reached a point where they literally turned over the keys of the church campus to a growing

⁴ From powerpoint presentation, The Great Ends of the Church (Presbyterian Church U.S.A.)

ethnic congregation in the neighborhood that needed new space. The one congregation gave its life as another was born.

Today the message is simple.

God has high expectations of you and me. The highest. Not in a perfectionistic way so much but in an aspirational way. Not in an elitist way but in a serving kind of way. To follow the way of Jesus. To declare the Kingdom of God with its special characteristics: ethical, qualitative, even perhaps artistic. Esthetic. Like carving out of marble a new reality, the very kingdom of heaven, representing a new hope us and for all the world.