

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost  
August 11, 2019  
The Church of the Holy Cross  
The Very Rev. Denise Trogdon

## **A Kingdom Perspective**

“Do not be afraid little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

I hope these words taken from our gospel reading this morning bring you peace and comfort. They are an assurance that the very heart of God is centered on God’s love for us and are meant to inspire courage to leave behind what we believe gives us security. While it is counter-intuitive to let go when things seem uncertain, it is in that act of faith that God blesses and transforms us.

As summer is quickly passing, I am aware that my time with you is growing short. Having moved many times in my life, I’m familiar with that unsettled feeling of being in the in-between.

But venturing into the unfamiliar has given me a deep appreciation of what I hold dear, and what I must let go of to have a kingdom perspective. That is to have a heart and mind centered on God, open to God’s possibilities for our lives.

As Jesus made his way to Jerusalem he taught his followers kingdom values and what it meant to be a disciple. His time was growing short and his message took on more intensity. Confronting the rigid social structure of his day, Jesus crossed social and political norms to model a kingdom without distinctions. While this made him particularly unpopular with the religious hierarchy, his message empowered those with little, to trust in God as their source of strength. The disciples were few and their adversaries great. Jesus called them a little flock to remind them of the great Shepherd who would watch over them. They were to live kingdom values in community and lean on one another for encouragement.

In the next breath Jesus radically challenged them to sell their belongings and give alms, pointing to the human condition of misplaced loyalties. Finding treasure in heavenly things, their hearts would change. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” This scripture often used in the context of stewardship, is really about faith in a loving God who wants more than the world for us. God wants to give us the kingdom.

When we place our dependence on things we can control, we are seduced into a false notion of our own power. Jesus challenged his disciples to let go of their security. He wanted them to recognize that they live in a world governed and protected by God. This was a timely message to trust in God’s promises as an antidote to fear.

But we are living in a particularly anxious time right now. Our sense of safety has been shaken. On practically a weekly basis we hear of human violence, a volatile economy, reasons to pull in and self protect. But God wants us to venture out, to trust not in an economy centered on prosperity but on salvation. Jesus urges us to be dressed for action and to have our lamps lit, expectant that the kingdom is coming. In our courage to reach beyond our own anxieties the kingdom is made manifest in our hearts. Loving God and neighbor as our first priority make our treasures heavenly things. When we boldly pray, “thy kingdom come,” we can be assured that our expectant faith will be blessed.

In the letter to the Hebrews, the writer defines faith as the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. He goes on to recount how our ancestors were blessed as they moved forward in faith, trusting that God is in control. As we move towards transition, of literal in-between, we must cling to the promise of God's love for us. I would like to share a short reading about faith by the writer Damon Perry. It is called the parable of the trapeze and I hope it will hold meaning for you in the days ahead.

“Sometimes I feel that my life is a series of trapeze swings. I'm either hanging on to a trapeze bar swinging along or, for a few moments in my life, I'm hurtling across space in between trapeze bars. Most of the time, I spend my life hanging on for dear life to my trapeze-bar-of-the-moment. It carries me along a certain steady rate of swing and I have the feeling that I'm in control of my life. I know most of the right questions and even some of the right answers. But once in a while, as I'm merrily (or not so merrily) swinging along, I look ahead of me into the distance, and what do I see? I see another trapeze bar swinging toward me. It's empty, and I know, in that place that knows, that this new trapeze bar has my name on it. It is my next step, my growth, my aliveness going to get me. In my heart-of-hearts I know that for me to grow, I must release my grip on the present well known bar, to move to the new one.

Each time it happens to me, I hope (no, I pray) that I won't have to grab the new one. But in my knowing place I know that I must totally release my grasp on my old bar, and for some moment in time hurtle across space before I can grab onto the new bar. Each time I am filled with terror. It doesn't matter that in all my previous hurtles across the void of unknowing, I have always made it. Each time I am afraid I will miss, that I will be crushed on the unseen rocks in the bottomless chasm between the bars. But I do it anyway. This is the essence of what the mystics call the faith experience.” I ask you, will we have faith in God's promises, even in times of fear?

This morning we bring to the waters of baptism, Casey Noah Hotchkiss. In faith we offer this child to God for blessing, trusting that God's care will shepherd him through this transitory life. Through baptism God conveys to us our identity as God's beloved children, so precious that God would go to any length for us. Our job is to receive God's love with gratitude and try to live into our calling. Because we struggle with faith, we need signs along the way and baptism is one of those outward and visible signs. The water, the oil and the fire remind us that God has claimed us, and shepherds us for our ultimate good. Have your lamps lit, expectant that God will care for us. Do not be afraid little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Let us pray:

O God of patient and gentle strength, who knows our needs even before we ask, may your loving presence guide us in this time of transition. Give us an open spirit, discerning hearts and clear minds, that we may trust your will for us and become ever more a place of broad welcome and service. Inspire our conversations, deepen our prayers, and unite us in your purpose for this community. All this we ask through Jesus our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.