

Children's Sermon

(I went) to the University of Oklahoma. Oklahoma is flat, flat, flat. How would you (describe) the Catalina Mountains to a child who had only lived in flat Oklahoma?

How would you describe (snow) to a child who lives in Haiti? How would you describe an (American) grocery store to a teenager who lives on the world's largest garbage dump in Rio?

How would (you) describe "Starry Night" to a blind person?

Have you ever noticed how often (we use) metaphors and similes to describe the world we live in, and the experiences we have? It is so important for us to communicate in relationships to build the bonds of friendship and fellowship.

How would you describe (falling) in love to a child who grew up in a violent, or dysfunctional household? Sometimes our words are simply too limited to convey true understanding. Yet, we try and try until the person we are talking with smiles and nods, "oh, yes, I get that!"

With all of that in mind, imagine what it (was like) for Jesus to introduce an entirely new understanding of the nature of God. While the traditional Jews of his day were very familiar with the Covenant with Abraham that made the Jews, the chosen people, that is not the relationship Jesus brought with him. In fact, the relationship that Jesus was introducing to the people was an extremely personal relationship.

Someone is going to say, "Pastor Alan, really, a personal relationship with Jesus? We're Lutheran, not Baptist." Okay, I get that.

(BUT,) you knew it was going to come didn't you? But, this new relationship is couched in (empire) language: the Kingdom of God. Jesus sets out to introduce this Kingdom of God, that isn't a place; and it isn't earthly; and it has nothing to do with armies, or war, or conquering, or even winning. It doesn't. Then.....you ask.....what is it about?

And this is where the metaphors come in.

Jesus, in today's Gospel, says the Kingdom of God (is like) a seed that is sown. In other places he says the Kingdom is like a man who threw a dinner-party. In other places it is like a man who had two sons. Or a woman that lost a gold coin. All metaphors and similes intended to raise the interest of...whom....us.

So, the best example we have of a kingdom, or a monarchy is the (family) of Windsor in Great Britain. The Queen is....queen. She has power, and influence, and good will towards her subjects. Does everyone love the queen? Probably not. But, if you do love and accept the queen's role, we would say she reigns over you. It isn't an abusive reign. It is a peaceful reign that is based in love and mutual care. Can you imagine a Brit who has a high esteem for the queen and all of the royals? Would that Brit be obedient? Probably. Would that Brit be taxed and counted? Absolutely.

We, in the colonies don't have that kind of connection with a monarchy, so (Jesus') term the Kingdom of God loses something in the translation for us.

But, don't be too quick to dismiss it. What Jesus was attempting to do was to help us with experiencing God in such a way that our daily, walking around decisions might reflect this

simple truth: God, who created and breathed life into you, seeks to rule and reign in your daily life.

The Kingdom of God is the reign and rule of God in us right now, today. Yah. That's the personal part of this relationship thing. Jesus still seeks to have you recognize that the spirit of God, the Spirit of all creation is connected to you deeply in here. To quote (Neil) DeGrasse Tyson "you, we, are all made of stardust." Oops, another metaphor that could confuse the matter.

And what does Jesus say about this Kingdom, or (reign) of God in our daily life? It grows. And as it grows it strengthens. And as it strengthens it becomes big enough, strong enough to shelter those in need....like, birds, Jesus says.

It is important to pause here and talk about this (growth) process. For God to reign in our daily life we have to accept God's presence....and that presence is understood to be dynamic and moving. Oh, and when God moves....the earth shudders, and our hearts go boom, boom, boom. Sometimes God can surprise us like that. Look at this child! I made it all for you to enjoy!

Of course, there's a problem. There's always a problem. That problem is the red line. We, humans, like to do things on our own. We like our independence. We like our free will to search and explore. We like to bask in the spotlight momentarily....so others will praise us for what we have done. Anyone here not like to be thanked for doing stuff?

So, here (is the) benefit. Every sales person knows to close the deal, the customer, you, need to understand the benefit of whatever product it is that they are selling. Right? The life insurance sales person will speak of benefit. The travel agent for the cruise will speak of benefit. The personal trainer will speak of the benefit of rigorous, and regular exercise. Benefit is a big deal for us.

So, what benefit was Jesus talking about when he taught of the Kingdom of God? You can hear....(depth) of roots, breadth of branches, strength of our core, and the sweetness of the fruits that result in patience, and love, and joy, and generosity, and kindness. Do people describe you by those words? When Jesus talks (about) the Kingdom of God he is not talking about the church in Africa; or the ministry in inner cities where crime and violence are rampant....no, (Jesus) is talking about what he brought to the people who came out to him. He touched them. He healed them. He forgave them. He set them free from the personal prisons that held and hold so many people today. (What) prisons? Regret. Disappointment. Sadness. Hopelessness. Isolation. Jesus steps into those empty dark places (and sets) the light before you. This is grace, amazing grace.

Paul knew that grace very personally. See, (he was) a warrior for the Lord. He was. He believed that all God wanted was obedience to the Law. That obedience meant harsh treatment toward those who failed to keep it. His rage led him to kill children of God, all in the name of rage. Rage is not a sign of the Kingdom, sorry. But it took Paul being (thrown) from his high-horse, to have his understanding shuffled. That's what the Kingdom of God does. It scrambles our assumptions. It scrambles our long list of sadnesses that we drag with us through this life. Jesus enables us to step away from all that. That is why Paul says....when you (come) to the Kingdom of God; when your old stuff is set down, the new stuff is stunning. The new stuff is very personal. The new stuff (creates) in you a new heart, a right spirit, the seed of love for others.

That is the Kingdom of God that Jesus talks about. It is powerfully strong. It is way different than what you thought it would be. It helps you let go of all that old, sad, stuff....and become made new. New life. New outlook. New Spirit. Wouldn't that be a great Father's Day gift for your dad? (It would) be like.....well you know. Amen.

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