

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Among You

Gospel Lesson

Luke 17:20-37 (NRSV)

²⁰ Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; ²¹ nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you."

²² Then he said to the disciples, "The days are coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. ²³ They will say to you, 'Look there!' or 'Look here!' Do not go, do not set off in pursuit. ²⁴ For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day. ²⁵ But first he must endure much suffering and be rejected by this generation. ²⁶ Just as it was in the days of Noah, so too it will be in the days of the Son of Man. ²⁷ They were eating and drinking, and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed all of them. ²⁸ Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot: they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, ²⁹ but on the day that Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and sulfur from heaven and destroyed all of them ³⁰—it will be like that on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. ³¹ On that day, anyone on the housetop who has belongings in the house must not come down to take them away; and likewise anyone in the field must not turn back. ³² Remember Lot's wife. ³³ Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it. ³⁴ I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. ³⁵ There will be two women grinding meal together; one will be taken and the other left." ³⁷ Then they asked him, "Where, Lord?" He said to them, "Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather."

Bible Focus

The Pharisees' questions about the coming reign of God seem a bit out of place in their location in Luke's Gospel. Scholars agree with this sentiment. Many of them think that this section was added a bit later, something that is not uncommon. In fact, many of the texts about the coming reign of God in the New Testament are thought to be added later. Why?

The Jewish people were a deeply persecuted people, at different times, over the timeline that the Bible spans. The time around Jesus's birth was very intense. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, during the formation of the early Christian movement, we see another very violent time for the Jews and (by then) the Christians also. It is during these times of intense violence and persecution that the people's focus on the "coming reign of God" intensifies. And, it is during that time when this section of Luke was probably written.

In our sermon for this week we heard a quote from Dr. Karen Baker-Fletcher, "One might say that the world is in a process of rebirth and that Christ's reign is a reign of labor pangs, in which the world resists the truth that evil is overcome...Christ has overcome death, hatred, and evil. Yet, the world continues in the delusion that Christ has not overcome these things and that the power of evil is real. The notion that evil has real power ... is a lie."

Even when we are able to agree with Dr. Baker-Fletcher, even when we know that Jesus has indeed already done the work of saving and destroying evil, there are times in our world where the violence that surrounds us may make us doubt. And like the Pharisees, we want to know when what our heart knows to be true and what we see with our eyes will be the same.

But that will take a radical sense of community to become so. That will take a perspective that can see beyond our partisan issues in this nation...and beyond that to see past the work and experience of our generations and our current nation states. The arc of justice bends towards the almighty. Evil has already lost, no matter who wins one election. Today's empires are tomorrows ashes. As they were during the time of Jesus. As they were before even that. And where two or three are gathered, there Jesus is as well.

Discussion Questions

1. Pastor Andy started the sermon with a short check-in. How do you stay healthy when things feel out of sorts? Does your faith play a role?
2. Do you ever think about the "the coming reign of God?" When? And how does that play out in your head?
3. How do you see God's present activity working in the world and in your life?
4. What if we lived our lives as if we believed Jesus when he said that the kingdom of God is among us? What would that look like?
5. "One might say that the world is in a process of rebirth and that Christ's reign is a reign of labor pangs, in which the world resists the truth that evil is overcome..." Share your thoughts on this quote from Dr. Karen Baker-Fletcher.

Prayer

God of Peace, we thank you for your reign among us. We thank you for your steadfastness throughout the ages. You who are timeless, beyond our understanding, and yet present with us in the relationships of love and grace help us to recognize your presence. And, help us to live into your vision for us. Amen.

"One might say that the world is in a process of rebirth and that Christ's reign is a reign of labor pangs, in which the world resists the truth that evil is overcome..."

-Dr. Karen Baker-Fletcher