

SERMON AT THE CLOSING EUCHARIST OF THE 23RD DIOCESAN CONVENTION OF THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF EASTERN MICHIGAN

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“Look! Come follow me,” Jesus says. “And I will make you fish for people.” And as we all know, they immediately left their nets and followed him. That’s crazy man! That’s crazy, you know what I’m sayin’? Dropping everything and following Jesus solely based on a hope. Solely based on a dream. A proposition. A proposition that the kingdom of God has come here and that with it, it’s very presence somehow, in this very presence somehow time is fulfilled. I mean imagine that. Imagine the kingdom of God come near. What does that look like? I mean, what does that actually look like? Universal justice for all people in all places. Regardless of skin color, or socio-economic position, or the kind of car you drive, or who your Daddy is — that’s important down south— [Crowd chuckles] or whomever you happen to love. Justice for everyone. Or maybe it is a peace that just passes understanding. Maybe a fullness. A knowing, a knowing, a knowing you are loved. You are necessary, you are precious, you are valuable because you are, just as you are. A lightness, a joy experienced through forgiveness. A grace unearned. A grace accepted. A grace given. Maybe it’s awakening to the Dawn of a new day and receiving it as your own resurrection. A chance for a new beginning. Remembering that we are children of the most high God Almighty, creator of heaven and earth and are, therefore, heirs to the kingdom of God, are we not?

Which is not this kingdom of God some distant, future hope that you might enter in the afterlife as your reward for good behavior in this life. That’s just crazy. But rather recognizing and accepting your repentance, the changing of your minds, despite growing evidence to the contrary: The wars, the evicipice, the unnecessary violence, the ugliness of human sin, that the kingdom of God has come here. That the kingdom of God is near. That the kingdom of God is not near us, but with us, among us here and now. I mean, isn’t it? Not fully, I mean not fully, certainly. I’ve got this whole thing here (gestures to bald head). I’m sure you are all blinded by the light, right? [Laughter from the crowd]. It’s not fully present, but you see it in glimpses of grace, and joy, and hope, and compassion, and forgiveness, and love, and unity, and sacrifice, and service. We experience it every day. We experience it every day and we physically, spiritually embody it as the body of Christ on earth, which is of course our message and our purpose. Are we clear?

If we are simply a worship club, motivated to protect an institution, then we do not have life-saving, life-giving, life-changing news, do we. But if we are, if we actually are the body of Christ, and if we believe, if we actually believe we are the Body of Christ, through the very kingdom of God that has come near in the eclipses that we see it in Amazing Grace. Whose sole purpose is to live in this grace, freely share it with a hurting world then that is good news. A good news that can and will and does change the world. It is the only thing that ever has. We live to be a presence to give a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven, that’s it. That’s it.

And my dear sisters and brothers, now is the time. Now is the time for us to change our minds. To repent and believe. Now is the time for us to embrace our true identity as the body of Christ, the living Christ. Now is the time to recognize the abundant grace we are awash in. Now is the time to immediately drop whatever net of distraction, or excuse, or rationalization, or fear that keeps us from immediately following Jesus. Now is the time. Now is the time if we live, actually live and give for the sake of making the good news of the kingdom come near, really actually near, embodying this good news, we won't have to worry about protecting or saving the institutional church. Now is the time because the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in this good news. It is the dawn of a new day. Everyday.

This is indeed a pivotal verse for a pivotal moment in the Gospel according to Mark and in the Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Michigan. It is a pivotal moment for the Episcopal Church in Michigan. A pivotal moment for each and every one of us. It is the dawn of a new day. And as with every new dawn, this is a time of great hope and joy, filled with challenges no doubt, but we are not alone. You are not alone. You have each other [Amen from person in the gathering]. You have each other — thank you — and we are never far from the spirit, holy presence among us, leading us, showing us glimpses of the kingdom in our midst. So, you can be of good courage, and full of great joy, for you are holy people. You are a blessed people. The very children of God, marked as Christ's own forever. And that means forever. There's nothing you can do to change it. That's the truth. "Do not worry about anything," Paul says, "but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God and the opinions of God, which surpass all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." It will. You're good.

I'm going to leave you with some wisdom from my friend, John Baquistan, who I read this morning. This is what he says about each day:

At the beginning of each day, after we open our eyes to receive the light of that day, as we listen to the voices and sounds around us, we must resolve to treat each hour as the rarest of gifts and be grateful for the consciousness that allows us to experience it. Recalling in thanks that our awareness is a present, a gift from we know not where, or how, or why. When we arise from sleep, we rise for the joy of the true work that we will be about this day and considerably cheer one another on. Life will always provide matters for concern. But each day brings with it reasons for joy. Each day carries the potential to bring the experience of heaven. Everyday has the potential to bring the experience of heaven. Have the courage to expect good from it.

Finally, he says this: "Be gentle with this light, and use this light of life to live fully in your time." My friends, this is the dawn of the new day. For the kingdom of God has come to you. Change your mind and believe in this good news.

That's it. That's it. That's all there is. And it's enough.