

Proper 9C (Pentecost 6), 2010

Text: Luke 10:1-20

Title: Jesus' Kingdom

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You're probably here today to hear a little something about America. You're probably here to give thanks for our country, to celebrate Independence Day, and to sing some patriotic songs.

If that's the case you might be disappointed (but don't blame me; Pastor Birkholz wrote this sermon, I'm just here to deliver it.)

You see, we've got something better for you today. We have something better than the fourth of July and fireworks, something better than George Washington and Ben Franklin, something better than citizenship in the United States. And that's the Kingdom of God.

Jesus sends His disciples out to proclaim, "The Kingdom of God has come near to you."

That's a familiar message. It was the message of John the Baptist. It was the message of Jesus Christ Himself. And now it's the message of the disciples.

The Kingdom of God is a big deal, a bigger deal than even the United States of America, or any other earthly kingdom or country.

The Kingdom of God is not a place. The Kingdom of God is not an idea. The Kingdom of God is a person.

Jesus sends out His disciples to prepare the way for Him. He is on the road. As you remember from last week, Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem. He's fixed His face towards Jerusalem. He's going there to die. Jesus knows that He will be betrayed, humiliated, tortured and killed. And yet He still goes.

As He goes Jesus sends out His disciples ahead of him to prepare the way.

How do they prepare the way? By preaching, "The Kingdom of God has come near to you." This is true because Jesus is coming. Jesus is God and Jesus is King. When Jesus shows up, God is ruling through Him. When Jesus comes, the Kingdom of God comes.

But Jesus has a strange way of being king. His kingdom is like none other on earth.

Now you Americans aren't too fond of kings. Two hundred and thirty four years ago you told the King of England, a man named George (who was actually a German Lutheran), that you would no longer be a part of His kingdom. You preferred to pick your own leaders and have presidents rather than kings. You wanted your independence. And you were willing to fight for it.

King George ruled by force. He made laws and he enforced them. When the colonists said, “no,” George sent in the army to enforce the laws. With independence and a new constitution, the United States got a new way of making laws- not by King and Parliament, but by President and Congress. And yet the law still had to be obeyed. The President is still commander in chief. He still commands an army.

Jesus’ army is a bit different. They don’t act like typical soldiers.

When soldiers go into battle, they go well supplied. They take with them plenty of provisions not just to fight, but to eat. As you know, “An army travels on its stomach.”

But Jesus’ messengers go into foreign territory woefully unprepared. They aren’t supposed to take with them any extra luggage, no extra clothes, and no food. They just show up in town and expect to be fed. Jesus’ messengers are more like beggars than soldiers.

When soldiers go into battle, they do so with an overwhelming force. The more the better. More soldiers means a bigger surge and a greater chance of success.

Jesus sends His messengers in two by two. Just two. They aren’t alone, but they aren’t going to overwhelm anyone either.

Jesus sends them as sheep rather than wolves. If Jesus really wanted to establish His kingdom on earth, He would certain send in a more bloodthirsty lot than these guys. He would send them as wolves among sheep.

Most kings establish their kingdoms through war. That was the way here in the United States. It took a war to gain independence and a new form of government.

Jesus establishes His kingdom by proclaiming peace. He doesn’t send His disciples into towns to pillage and plunder, to take what they can find and to control these towns, but to declare peace with them.

Most kings don’t tolerate rejection. If someone refuses the king, the king fights back. If someone rejects the President’s authority, he fights back, too. Remember back to the Civil War. The North did not allow the South to secede quietly, but fought to keep them in the Union.

But Jesus is different. When His disciples are rejected, they aren’t supposed to fight back. They aren’t supposed to call down fire from heaven. They aren’t supposed to call for reinforcements.

They are simply to shake the dust off their feet and move on. Their punishment will come, but Jesus won’t force them to be a part of His kingdom.

The Kingdom of God was coming to the towns of Galilee and Judea, because Jesus was coming. He sent His disciples ahead to prepare the way for Him. But He did not send them as soldiers or policemen. He did not send them to enforce His laws or collect tribute.

He sent them to preach. He sent them to heal. He sent them to forgive.

Despite this crazy plan, things worked. The disciples did not return rejected. The disciples did not return disappointed. The disciples returned with joy.

Their joy though, was misplaced. They rejoiced over their victory over Satan, and their ability to cast out demons.

Jesus recognizes that this is a good thing, but it's not the best thing.

The best thing for the disciples was that their names were written in heaven.

Whether or not they could heal people, whether or not they could cast out demons, whether anyone listened to their preaching- these were not the big deal. The big deal was that their names were written in heaven.

That's good news for you, too. Sometimes things will go well. Sometimes the church will be packed, we'll be baptizing people and welcoming new members left and right, and we'll have lots to be thankful for.

Other times things won't go well. We'll hear nothing but rejection. We will feel like failures and doubt ourselves and even our God.

And it's not just that way in the church. Think about your life. You will have good days and bad. You will have successes and failures. You will have days when everything you do seems tainted by sin, and you will have days when you'll actually accomplish some good.

No matter what happens, in church, in life, in politics, there is still joy for you. Because your names, too, are written in heaven. Your names are written in the Lamb's book of life. At the end of the day, that's all that really matters.

Whether you are an American or not, whether you're a Democrat or a Republican, whether served in the military or not, when the Lord's Day comes, all that matters is that your name is written in heaven.

And it's still okay to be proud of your country and to give thanks for your freedoms. But you have something much better as a citizen of the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God has come to you, because Jesus Christ has come to you. He has sent His messengers, His pastors to you to proclaim this message. Jesus is coming, not to destroy you, but to save you. Not to punish you, but to die for you. Not bringing war, but peace.

If you can always reject Him, Jesus won't force anyone to live in His kingdom. But if you do reject Jesus, you're putting yourself in the same place as Sodom and the other towns that rejected Him.

So rejoice, your names are written in heaven, God Himself has come to you in Jesus Christ. He is your King, a King unlike any earthly king. He has come to serve you, to give you gifts and to bless you. And there's no reason to declare independence from Him.