

# THE KINGDOM OF GOD HAS COME NEAR

Luke 10:1-20

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Series C)

July 7, 2019

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost comes from *The Gospel According to Luke*, chapter 10, verses 1 through 20. It is on page 734 of the pew Bible. In this gospel lesson, the power of the Kingdom of God is revealed. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Luke 10, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>1</sup> After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. <sup>2</sup> And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. <sup>3</sup> Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup> Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. <sup>5</sup> Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' <sup>6</sup> And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup> And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. <sup>8</sup> Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. <sup>9</sup> Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' <sup>10</sup> But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, <sup>11</sup> 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' <sup>12</sup> I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

<sup>13</sup> "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>14</sup> But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. <sup>15</sup> And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades.

<sup>16</sup> "The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

<sup>17</sup> The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" <sup>18</sup> And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

<sup>19</sup> Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. <sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

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The Kingdom of God has come near to you. Whether you believe it or not, whether you want to believe it or not, the Kingdom of God has come near to you. It might be pleasant for you, it might be beyond unpleasant, but the Kingdom of God has come near to you.

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This is the message Jesus sent messengers to proclaim. Some villages would receive it, along with the peace of God, and others villages would reject it and not receive the peace of God. But the message is the same in both cases: “**The Kingdom of God has come near [to you]**” (10:9, 11).

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We live in a world where people can pretty much believe whatever they want. And this seems to be mostly beneficial for a society. You can say that your god is a tie-dye unicorn made out of Skittles and you won't get your head chopped off. This freedom has not always existed in every time or location on earth. Now theological errors like that are sins against the First and Second Commandments, and they will eventually catch up to a person. But Christians tolerate such errors, partly because allowing them also allows us to confess that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But just because people have freedom to believe and practice their religion freely, doesn't mean that all beliefs are equally valid or equally true. This is, perhaps, the great heresy of our generation. It goes like this: *Your truth might be true for you, but someone else's truth might be true for them.* This is pure nonsense. Either God is a tie-dye unicorn made out of Skittles or he's not. By the way, he's not, and we know he's not, because he has revealed himself in a different way. God is who he is, regardless of whether or not you want him to be who he is.

But the heresy of our day has been to categorize religious truth as a different kind of truth, so that a religious truth claim doesn't fall into the same category of truth as math, science, and history. The idea is that religious truth really just exists within a person's mind, and the individual person gets to choose what is true in their own mind. This idea is called “relativism,” and it has become the prevailing way that our society thinks about religion.

Relativism quietly assumes atheism or agnosticism to be true. Atheism is the belief that God does not exist. Agnosticism is the belief that we don't know if God exists. The end result is just a practical atheism, where we just figure, *Since we don't know whether or not God exists, we might as well just act like he doesn't.*

Relativism assumes that either atheism or agnosticism is true and throws all other religious claims into a different category of truth. So it tries to accept, or even celebrate, every religion, just so long as people don't start thinking of God as anything more than an imaginary friend.

Some religions are okay with this, because they're not trying to deal with universal and eternal truths; they're just trying to provide some therapeutic or moral value. But most religions in the world are not okay with relativism. And Christianity, especially, is not okay with it, because our truth claims are based on actual events of history, namely, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These are events where, if they are true—and we have plenty of evidence to say they are—if these events are true, then our faith is true. And if these events are false, then our faith is false. So Christianity does not accept relativism. Christianity does not submit to being placed in some imaginary category of truth.

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Now why am I telling you all this. You didn't come here for a lecture on relativism. I am telling you this, first, because our text speaks to it, and second, because this is the prevailing worldview in our society. And if we don't recognize relativism for what it truly is—atheism—it has the power to invade our thinking. Sometimes we start to believe things just because we hear them so often.

But is relativism compatible with the Christian faith? What does Jesus tell his disciples to do in the towns that reject them? Does he say, “That's okay; they have their own truth”? No. The

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message is the same: “The kingdom of God has come near.” Whether you want to believe it or not, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.”

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So what does this mean? For some it means peace. For others it means judgment. For those who receive the message of the Gospel, the presence of the Kingdom of God means peace beyond anything the world offers. And for those who reject the message of the Gospel, it means judgment beyond anything this world has ever seen.

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The text begins with Jesus appointing seventy-two “others.” These “others” are in addition to his twelve disciples. Jesus usually had more than just twelve disciples. Back in chapter 9 Jesus sent the Twelve out on a similar mission, but here he sends seventy-two others.

He sent them in sets of two into the towns in which he was about to go. Jesus described their preaching mission as a harvest. “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (10:2). In other words, there are many who need to hear the Word of God and be gathered into his Kingdom, but there are few preachers to do the work. So he commanded them to pray for more workers, and this continues to be a need for us today.

And Jesus gives them some odd and difficult instructions. They are to take nothing with them on their journey. “Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals” (10:4). They are to trust the people they preach to for their daily needs. Later in *The Gospel of Luke*, shortly before his crucifixion, Jesus changed these instructions. The world was about to become more hostile to Christ (22:35-38), and a time was coming when they should expect no welcome in a town. But for now Jesus knows they will be welcomed in enough places, so he sends them out with nothing.

Whenever they enter a house, they are to say, “Peace be to this house!” (10:5). Some will receive this greeting of peace. Jesus calls that person “a son of peace” (10:6). To such a person, the peace will rest and remain. But if a son of peace is not there, the peace will return to the messenger. It kind of sounds like an “I’m-rubber-you’re-glue” sort of thing.

Now the peace Jesus speaks of is different than the way we usually think of peace. And this is important. We tend to think of peace merely as the absence of violence. If two countries who are at war with each other sign a peace treaty, it means they stop fighting. They might not become allies, but they stop trying to destroy each other. Or if people within a family are at odds with each other, and they finally stop fighting, we consider that peace, even if they still don’t like each other. Whether it’s in our homes, in our country, or around the world, we think of peace as a condition where hostility doesn’t interfere with our ability to function. But this kind of peace is too weak. The biblical concept of peace is much stronger.

The biblical idea of peace comes from the Hebrew word *shalom*, which usually gets translated as “peace,” but really means something more like “wholeness” or “completeness.” To be at peace with someone in the biblical sense does not simply mean there is no hostility; it means that two people are in perfect harmony with one another. And having the peace of God does not simply mean that God is no longer angry with us, but that we are one with him. The relationship is not neutral; it is positively perfect. This is the kind of peace the messengers proclaimed, and this is the kind of peace God grants to us through Jesus Christ. Jesus has made peace with God through the blood of his cross (Col. 1:20). That means we are purely and perfectly reconciled to God through him.

So the messengers declare peace to these towns, and then they deliver this peace in two ways: by healing the sick and by preaching. The healing of the sick is the proof of their

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preaching. And the message they preach is simple: “**The Kingdom of God has come near to you**” (10:9).

In the towns that did not receive them, Jesus instructed them to wipe the dust off their feet. This was something of an insult. It was essentially calling a town “unclean.” *I don’t even want a trace of your town left on the bottom of my feet.* In a Hebrew society, this was especially insulting, because it didn’t just imply physical uncleanness, but also spiritual uncleanness. So this was a warning to the town that what they have done by rejecting the messengers has made them unclean before God. The one who rejects the messenger rejects Jesus, who sent them. And the one who rejects Jesus also rejects the Father, who sent him. By rejecting the messengers, they were really rejecting God.

And then the message to this town was essentially the same: “**The Kingdom of God has come near**” (10:11). But the result of the Kingdom’s presence will mean something completely different. Instead of coming in peace, the Kingdom will come against them in judgment. These are the instructions Jesus gives to the seventy-two.

Then there’s a gap between Jesus sending them out and when they return. Luke doesn’t actually record anything about their trip. All he records is their response when they return, which is incredibly joyful. They actually seem surprised that it worked. They say, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” (10:17).

And Jesus saw something even more remarkable. He “**saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven**” (20:18). And Jesus isn’t surprised that his disciples were able to cast out demons. He had given them this authority. Jesus had given them authority over serpents and scorpions, which are symbolic of evil, “**and over all the power of the enemy**” (10:19).

All of this is remarkable. The demons were subject to the disciples in Jesus’ name, and Satan was thrown down from heaven. This is worth being excited about. But Jesus wants them to rejoice over something else: that their names are written in heaven. Satan has no place in heaven—he is thrown down—but the children of God do have a place in heaven.

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So we learn two things about the Kingdom of God in this text.

First, we learn that the Kingdom of God is a present reality. This has often confused both Jews and Christians, because the Kingdom of God does not look the way we expect a kingdom to look. We expect a kingdom to exercise political and military power. The Jews that rejected Jesus were looking for a different kind of kingdom. They were looking for a new political kingdom that would overthrow the Roman occupation of Israel and restore worldly power and fortune to Israel. They were not looking forward to the true Messiah, who would make peace with God, but to a false christ, who would serve their worldly and political ambitions. So they failed to see Jesus as the Christ, and they did not recognize the Kingdom he established on earth.

Ironically, Christians have sometimes committed the same error. Though every Christian recognizes Jesus as the Christ—that’s what it means to be a Christian—many are simply not content with the form the Kingdom of God takes on earth. They would prefer the false christ who exercises political or military power. So they still look for a different Kingdom of God that looks more like the kingdoms of this world. They fail to recognize that the Kingdom of God is a present reality. It came to earth in Jesus Christ, and he set it up this way.

Most of Jesus’ teaching was on the topic of the Kingdom of God, and the basic message was that the Kingdom of God had come to earth in him. Wherever the King is, the Kingdom is also.

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The Kingdom of God isn't so much a place as it is an activity. Since God is King of all heaven and earth, his Kingdom is never confined to just one place. A political reign somewhere on earth is just too small. Wherever the King is doing his kingly work, the Kingdom is there also.

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The second thing we learn about the Kingdom of God is that the power is in the Word of God. That's what Jesus sent the seventy-two out with. Jesus didn't go with them, at least not physically. He went with them through his Word. He sent them as his messengers to declare peace and proclaim the arrival of his Kingdom.

And what happened when they proclaimed this Word? The demons were subject to them. More than that, Satan fell like lightning from heaven. When they proclaimed the Word according to Jesus' command, Satan fell from heaven.

Now what does that mean? It's tied up in the meaning of the name "Satan." The devil has many names, and the Bible uses different names for different purposes. The name "Satan" means "accuser." And this is significant here. Satan accuses us of sin. He accuses us of rebelling against God and being unworthy of his kindness. And he's right according to the doctrine of the Law. But the Word of God also proclaims the doctrine of the Gospel—that the Kingdom of God has come to earth humbly and graciously in Jesus Christ, and God forgives you on account of Jesus' sacrifice. And what happens in the heavenly courtroom when this evidence is introduced? The prosecuting attorney is cast out.

You're on trial. And you did everything you are accused of. But the Word of God declares you innocent on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice. And not only are you declared innocent, but the prosecuting attorney is disbarred. He is cast out of the heavenly courtroom. He's not even allowed to accuse you before God anymore. He is forbidden from bringing your case up anymore.

And notice this: this is not what happens when the Word of God is proclaimed in *heaven*. This is what happens when the Word of God is proclaimed on *earth*. And it's not even what happens when *Jesus* proclaims the Word. This is what happens when the *messengers* proclaim the Word. Messengers preach the Word on earth and heaven responds by casting Satan out.

The Word of God has a power beyond any power of this world. It defeats enemies the kingdoms of this world can't even see. It binds demons and casts Satan out of heaven. It grants a freedom that death cannot even take away.

This is what gives us such confidence in the Church. This is what gives us confidence in this congregation. This is the Kingdom of God on earth. On our own, we're not important. We're not powerful. But our King is here. He comes to us through his Word. He comes to us through bread and wine with his very body and blood. He says, "You are forgiven." Our accuser is silenced, we are declared innocent by the blood of Christ, and we have a freedom from sin that death cannot even take away. "The kingdom of God has come near to you." Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.