

Sermon for Christ & Grace Church Petersburg, VA
Proper 29, Year A, November 26, 2017
The Rev. Bill Queen
“Participating in God’s Kingdom”
Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Psalm 100; Matthew 25:31-46

our Gospel passage today refers to the time of Jesus’ future judgment, when he will act as king over all peoples; seeing our world as God’s kingdom is something we hear about often: we started our service saying “blessed be his [God’s] kingdom, now and for ever;” in the creed we will affirm that God’s “kingdom will have no end;” in the Lord’s Prayer we will ask “thy kingdom come” and remember “thine is the kingdom;” yet I’m not sure that, even as often as we say these words, we recognize what or where God’s kingdom is, or how we actually participate in it

I’m reminded of the Harry Potter books and films which portray a whole world which is parallel to the one we live in, and yet unseen; Harry Potter knows nothing of it until he is told that he is a wizard and begins to learn about this other world; it is a strange world populated by wizards, good and evil, who have special powers; there are things from that other world that only wizards can see, like hidden train platforms, entire city streets, and a school campus in an old castle; the good wizards spend their time battling evil; I imagine most of you are familiar enough with the stories that you know that, in the end, love wins out over everything

God’s kingdom is a lot like that; it exists fully within this everyday world of ours, yet you can’t necessarily see it; many people don’t know about this kingdom or its king; we only know about it because we have been told about it and initiated into it through our baptism; we keep being instructed about it through the Bible; and through our prayers, our participation in church, and from the witness of other Christians, we learn to see it and to take part in it; sometimes it involves us in the battle of good over evil; and we know that God’s love will win out, in the end, over everything

so, we live in a different world, somewhat, in a different kingdom, than those who do not know God; we live among them on the same streets, shop in the same stores, and watch the same TV shows; but we have, as members of this kingdom, a different set of hopes, assurances, and promises—we know about

God's love; our job is not to be content to live separately in God's kingdom, apart from this world, but to engage ourselves enough in the everyday world that we can be witnesses to it about this other unseen world; to share our hopes, assurances, and promises—and most of all, to share that knowledge about God's love; our job is to bring the whole world into God's kingdom

that is exactly what today's parable of the sheep and the goats is all about; the Ezekiel and Psalm passages we heard today talk about God being our shepherd, or the king acting as the shepherd of God's people; but Christ's coming to earth among us, and inviting us to continue his ministries, transfers a new responsibility to us: we share in that shepherding responsibility now; and notice how the parable presents people who are not fully aware of God's kingdom, and who are not fully aware of their participation in it, nor of the consequences of their participation in it; and whether or not they were aware of it even as they were doing it, people who did the kingdom work will "inherit the kingdom" prepared in advance for them

like those invisible trains and flying cars in Harry Potter, what we can't see with our eyes is the person of Christ in our midst; but as Christians instructed into the workings of God's kingdom, we need to learn to see with our mind's eye, and with our heart's eye, to see Christ's presence, as he says, "in the least of these who are members of my family;" anything we do, or fail to do, we do it, or don't do it, to Jesus

and we are given a list of all in whom we are to look for Christ; it is not an exhaustive list, but it is one illustrative of the kind of people in whom we are to seek to serve Christ: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and those in prison: in short, the poorest and the neediest people; and while our ministries to them must include the needed food, drink, welcome, clothing, taking care of, and visiting, we do not forget that through providing for these needs we are also providing hope, assurance, and promise—and most of all, are sharing not just the knowledge about God's love, but the very experience of God's love

yes, we live in God's kingdom, but it is not a private kingdom just for us; it is not a kingdom of privilege for us: it is a kingdom of service and of love by us; remember what God's kingdom is; remember where God's kingdom is; remember how we are called to participate in it