

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Jesus began the kingly reign of heaven on earth with the call to repent and believe the good news...when Jesus called the disciples to be 'fishers of men'...when He told them they were the salt of the earth and the light of the world... Jesus was placing these disciples into the line of Old Testament prophets, as spokesmen for the God who acts in history. And so it is for His church today...for you and me.

When Jesus was baptized to fulfill all righteousness...when Jesus taught his disciples that He came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it...when He told his disciples that their righteousness was to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees...when He called them to be perfect even as their heavenly Father is perfect, Jesus was teaching His disciples that the way to righteous living is through Jesus. And so it is for His church today...for you and me.

When Jesus took His disciples to the towns and villages of Galilee, preaching and teaching that people should 'repent and believe the good news'...when the call to repentance and faith was met with either faith or rejection...when He prepared them for a life of conflict in a fallen world, He was molding their will for a life of mission activity. And so it is for His church today...for you and me.

When John asked, through his disciples, 'are you the Christ, or do we look for another,' ...when the towns and villages to which Jesus and the disciples traveled refused to repent...when the Scribes and Pharisees looked for way to destroy Jesus...when Jesus' family came for an intervention...His response was to teach His disciples: "I may not be the Messiah people want, but I am the Messiah people need." That is what the Kingdom parables of Matthew 13 are all about.

So, in today's gospel reading [13.1-9, 18-23] Jesus tells His disciples what the kingly reign of heaven on earth is like. It's like "*a farmer who goes out to sow seed.*" Jesus is the farmer. His word is the seed.

- The Word is a saving Word. "*The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Repent and believe the good news,*" [4.17]. It gives what it asks for, and it is either to be received with faith or is rejected in unbelief. "Whoever who has ears to hear, let them hear," [13.9]
- The Word is a vulnerable Word. It can be snatched away. It can be scorched by troubles and persecution. It can be choked by the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches [11.3-7; 18-23]. "Whoever who has ears to hear, let them hear," [13.9]
- The Word is a fruitful Word...to be received with joy, take deep root, understood, and bear Kingdom fruit. [13.8; 23] The Kingly reign of heaven on earth is like a small seed that that grows to be shade for birds [13.31-32]. The Kingly Reign of heaven on earth is like a bit of leaven that leavens a whole batch of dough [13.33]. "Whoever who has ears to hear, let them hear," [13.9]

The Heavenly Reign on earth is an engaging Word. Jesus sows. He plants. He leavens. The word He sows, plants and leavens comes bearing gifts of repentance and faith. Where ever is it sowed, planted and leavened it will be received with faith, or it will be

rejected in unbelief. That's how life in God's heavenly reign on earth is like.

The Heavenly reign on earth is a reconciling word. 2 Corinthians 5 records it this way:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

- First, He plants His reconciling word **IN** us...to be received with joy...rooted, permeated deeply into our very being...taken to heart so that it guides the process of our thinking, speaking and living.
- Secondly, He scatters His reconciling word **THROUGH** us in a way that promotes God's peace and God's justice in these uncertain times.

Reconciliation is a restorative word that, for me, articulates a Christ-centered response to the civil unrest in this city and other cities in the US, as well as other cities of the world,

The word Justice, for example, is a word that describes, on the one hand, a genuine desire for all people to be treated equally. Justice also, on the other hand, is a word that is infused with power, control, exacting punishment, canceling opposition and destroying institutional systems.

Reconciliation is a healing word. 2 Corinthians continues: *in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.* [2 Corinthians 5.19]

- Jesus came for the express purpose of bringing all people back to God through the perfect life He lived for us, the innocent death He died to forgive our sins, and His resurrection to assure us that we are His "*new creation.*" [2 Corinthians 5.17]
- God entrusts God's people to live this message as we interact with those He has placed in our lives so that "*justice may run down like water and righteousness like mighty stream.*" [Amos 5.24]
- Reconciliation sets in motion The Great Commandment to "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind*"; and, '*Love your neighbor as yourself.*'"

We know, in the face of the rhetoric we read and hear, that the still small voice of reconciliation is at work through any number of ministries and people who are bringing God's peace to where there seems to be no peace.

Thank you to those who are doing just that. Thank you to those who are hearing the still small voice of reconciliation moving you to action. Thank you to those whose place in life is to turn on the power of prayer for God to powerfully move His church to be agents of reconciliation.

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