

Brackenhurst 29 November 2009
The Hope of the Coming Messiah

Welcome

Call to Worship & Opening Prayer
(Advent Candle)

- Hymn 244 — Sing we the King

Welcome & Notices (Advent Candle)

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

- Hymn 777 — O Breath of Life

Offering and Prayer

Scripture:

Isaiah 51:4-8

Rom 13:8-10

Mat 25:31-46

- Hymn 138 — Seek ye First

Message

INTRODUCTION

- One's final sermon in a congregation is always a strange moment because there are all sorts of expectations attached.
 - It is a very emotional moment for me
 - * And, i guess for members for the congregation (for different reasons!)
- But one wants to offer up something profound that the congregation can remember one by
 - Then of course there are those who suggested that I go out with a bang and something really controversial
 - * Like, the Christmas story is all a myth
 - And then there's the reality of a final sermon coming in the midst of a whole lot of other stuff that's happening — packing up a home, saying good-bye to friends and preparing for a move
- So, I've been saved by the lectionary, with today being the first Sunday in Advent
 - I will be doing something a little different this evening, though.

- Today we look at the hope of the coming Messiah, and I guess that that is also about the coming Kingdom of God.
- When the prophets wrote about their and God's desire for things to be different, and for a leader to lead them
 - It was also about a transformed world
 - * And Christmas is one time when this transformed world seems closer.
- Regardless of one's religious persuasion or not there is a sense of peace and goodwill to those around us
 - I love 94.7 and their Christmas wish list
 - * On Friday they did a Hanukkah wish list
 - This is all about signs of the Kingdom of God breaking into this world
- As Christians we are called to be the guardians of that kingdom;
 - guardians of hope that things can be different — and it is this desire for things to be different, and the willingness to make it so that Jesus says, in the parable that we read earlier, that is the hall mark of his people
- And as Jesus tells the parable he speaks of the people who represent him in the world, and who are they?
 - They are not the wealthy, the well educated, the politicians, the connected.
- Jesus says that he dwells richly with the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the naked, the sick and the captive.
 - Whatever you have done for these, says Jesus, you have done for me; what you have not done for them, you have not done for me
- This is the way of life that Jesus invites us into; these are the people — the hopeless — to whom we are to communicate the message of hope
 - These are the people who need to know that the kingdom of God is at hand
 - * These are people who have no hope
 - What a wonderful gift; what a wonderful privilege to be able to offer some sort of hope to them
- And you and I, in this privileged community are the ones who can do that.
 - We are the only hope that some people have!
- So this morning I want to look at how we share the message of hope, the message of the kingdom of God, with the hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick and captive
 - And to do that just by looking at some of what it means to live in the kingdom of God
- To be messengers of hope
 - Kingdom Living is a way of life
 - Kingdom Living is an action
 - Kingdom Living brings the world back into balance

(1) Kingdom living is a way of life

- Jesus as he tells the parable, speaks of those receiving the inheritance, the sheep, and as he tells them what they've done in feeding the hungry and so on the righteous respond in this way:
 - “When Lord, did we see you hungry or thirsty, and respond to those needs?”
- As I looked at those words what I realised was that what Jesus is looking for, what God is looking for, the kind of response that need needs, is this:
 - Not a response that is thought out
 - * not a response in which we count the cost
 - * not a response in which we reluctantly decide to do something
 - But a response that flows so naturally from us that we don't even think about what we're doing.
- Do you remember learning to drive?
 - It's that time of the year when many young people are suddenly getting their licences
- But for me it was a terrible experience
 - You had to think about all things happening at the same time
 - * Checking mirrors, watching traffic, changing gears, braking, accelerating
 - * There's a lot going on, and in the beginning it's not easy
 - It's easy to point a car and go, but it's not so easy to do all the other stuff
 - * Until you have practised enough so that the actions of driving a motor car safely come naturally
- And this is the attitude that we are called to have as Christ followers
 - it is this attitude that transforms the world
- It starts by thinking about our actions, by thinking about how to respond to those in need in a way that is constructive
 - It starts by considering the cost
- And while in the beginning it may seem overwhelming it becomes an action that is automatic
 - That when we see a need, we respond.
- When others look at us they say wow, what an amazing person you are
 - And we don't understand why they're saying it because it's a way of life
- Kingdom living is a way of life.

(2) Kingdom living is an action

- Secondly, Kingdom living is an action.

- As Jesus continues speaking to the righteous he says, “whatever you did for the least of these you did for me”
 - * The operative word being ‘did’.
- Now I know you’re not like this because I have seen your generosity over the years that I’ve been here, so I can only speak about me, but one of the things that characterises my life, when somebody asks me for something my first response so often
 - Before I even think about it
- My first response is how can I get out of this.
 - How can I say ‘no’ in a nice way!
 - How can I turn people away from the church without actually helping them
 - * Because it gets tiresome sometimes when you have person after person looking for work, for food, for money
 - I take my hat off to Debby
- We were at a ministers retreat the other day, and one of the ministers leading session, Brian Smith, said this, and it was kind of a throw away comment, but it stuck with me
 - “Imagine if we were a church that said ‘yes!’”
 - * “Imagine if we were a church that said ‘yes!’”
- But instead when somebody phones to want a child baptised the first thing we say is “Are you a member?”
 - We really want to say no
 - * We don’t want to do
- Jesus said, “Whatever you did...”
 - I think we need to plan to do
- And I don’t mean that we need to sit down and work out strategies and do long term planning about how we’re going to save the world
 - But to talk about how we say yes in a way that really transforms people
- I don’t think that it is about giving out a food parcel, or taxi money
 - But it’s about saying when I am approached how can ‘I’
 - * I, not the church
 - respond to feed, clothe, heal, visit
- In such a way that transforms, rather than creates a dependancy
 - It’s a doing word
- And my last point for this morning

(3) Kingdom living brings the world back into balance

- When the prophets in the Old Testament wrote about the one they hoped for, when they wrote about the salvation of the world
 - a key part of that vision was the desire for justice
- And I think in a strange way this is also illustrated in the parable of the sheep and the goats
 - It seems to me that they're separated and weighed against each other
- But justice in the Bible doesn't mean punishment for the wicked, rather it means bringing the world back into balance.
 - The Kingdom of God is about a new world that is envisioned in which everybody has enough, in which there are no hungry, naked, thirsty, strangers
 - * In which there are no ill and none who are in prison.
- One of the things that we chatted about, I don't remember is it was in 101 or Revelation was Hell
 - We didn't spend a lot of time it, but we spoke about whether there really is a hell or not.
 - If I had more time I would preach a sermon
 - * "Why I don't believe in hell"
- Lots of times we justify our believe in hell because we believe that in order for justice to be served the wicked must be punished
 - So there has to be a place of punishment
 - * Whether that is in this life in a jail cell somewhere in this life, or whether it is about divine retribution in the life to come
- My justification in saying that there is no hell is to ask what is the point?
 - Surely redemption is better than punishment?
- If I were God, if I were the minister of correctional services
 - And I assure you they re not the same
- But for me the better outcome by far would be for the offender to be transformed into a person who contributes rather than who lives under permanent punishment
 - That is true justice
 - * That is restoring the world to balance
 - Creating a place where people are able to overcome their hurts to become the people God created them to be
- God knows our world today is out of balance in so many ways
 - Just look at the difference between what the highest paid executives earn, the what the poorest employees earn, never mind those who are unemployed.
 - Look at the way we spend so much time at work, and so little recreating
- As kingdom people trying to communicate the hope that is the kingdom of God we ought to working to bring things, to bring the world back into balance

- And again, you would need to work out how to do that for yourself
 - * To bring more balance in the part of the world that you intersect

CONCLUSION

- When I was very young one of the first movies I remember watching was one that was destined to become a classic
 - I wasn't keen to see it, but my father said we've got to go
 - * Everybody at school will be talking about it
- We watched it at the Constancia in Benoni, and the movie started, and the screen went wide, and it began with those now famous words shown across the screen
 - "A long time ago, in a galaxy far far away..."
- And then the music started and the words "Star Wars" came up on the screen and as the title went off into the distance words began scrolling up the screen telling the story:
 - Episode IV, a New Hope
 - * And if you remember the story Princess Leia the rebel leader, uses the droid R2D2 to send a message to Obi Wan Kenobi which says this:
 - "You're our only hope; come and save us"
- People today face threats in their lives that are every bit as frightening as Darth Vader and the emperor in Star Wars
 - For many people we are their only hope
- Role of the church is not to say 'no', rather is to be a beacon of hope in a world in which little is found.
 - It is to be a beacon of hope to the hungry, to the thirsty, to the strangers from foreign countries, to the naked, to the sick, to those who are imprisoned.
- This Christmas I pray that each one of us would say yes
 - That we would live a kingdom way of life
 - That we would be willing to do
 - * And that in this way we will bring the world back into balance
- And maybe this Christmas each of us can be a gift of hope to someone who has none.
 - May it be so for you, even as it is for me.
- Amen

Prayer of Response and Intercession

- Hymn 789 — Christ for the World we Sing

Benediction & Doxology