

Mark 10:13-16 (Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost/Proper 22—Series B)

“Receiving the Reign”

Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT

October 3, 2021

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text is from the Gospel reading in Mark 10:

¹³And they were bringing little children to Him so that He might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴But when Jesus saw it, He was indignant and He said to them, “Let the little children come to me. Stop preventing them. For to such as these is the reign and rule of God. ¹⁵Assuredly I say to you, whoever does not receive the reign of God like a little child shall surely not enter into it.” ¹⁶And taking them into His arms, He blessed them, putting His hands on them.

When you and I hear the word “kingdom” we tend to think of an area of land with borders and boundaries over which a queen or a king rules. For example, the English Kingdom—“the sun never sets on the British Empire.” There were the kingdoms of Rome and Greece and the Byzantine Empire, too. In fact, you can consider every nation-state a “kingdom” that is governed and ruled within its boundaries.

But that’s not how it is with “the Kingdom of God.” It is not defined by the boundaries and borders of physical land. The Kingdom of God is God’s reign and rule. It is not primarily a place. In fact, the reign of God is not static. It “comes” among people. For the King, the God of heaven, has come down in the person of the divine Son to reign and perform His kingly deeds among people. The Kingdom of God, or better, the reign and rule of God, is a divine action that happens where Jesus is, through His words and deeds. The reign of God is God’s action in Jesus to restore the world, overcoming Satan and sin completely.

The Kingdom of God, then, is that which God alone gives, and people receive. All people are completely helpless in their relationship to God’s reign and rule. We cannot claim it. We cannot take it by force to make it ours. We cannot usurp it. Nor can you and I earn it,

but it, bribe God for it, or any other such things. By nature, we humans are in rebellion against the reign of God because of our fallen condition, because of our sins.

As people who fail to always fear, love, and trust in God above all things, we are God's enemies and are not under His reign and rule. As people who fail to always love others and fail to be last of all and servant of all, we are separated from God's reign and rule. Colossians 1:13 talks about us in our fallen, sinful condition as being under the "domain of darkness." We are conceived and born under the power of the devil, under Satan's rule. You and I and all people would be lost forever in eternal death if not for the grace of God in sending His One-of-a-Kind Son to bring His reign and rule among us in order to give us a place in that gracious reign "without any merit or worthiness" in us.

God came down into the world, into human flesh in Jesus, to save people from their sins, from death, and from the power of the devil. God committed Himself fully to reclaiming His creation from Satan's kingdom and restoring it, removing the effects of satanic power and human sin. This Jesus did decisively and victoriously through His sacrificial death on a cross and His glorious resurrection from the dead.

In His perfect life, death, and resurrection, Jesus has brought the reign and rule of God breaking into and crashing in upon the reign of Satan and has already begun to put it to an end. Through the Gospel of Christ's death on a cross for you and His rising again for you, your sins stand forgiven. By God's grace through saving faith in Jesus Christ alone, you have been transferred from the devil's kingdom and brought under the gracious reign and rule of God in Christ Jesus. Salvation from sin, death, and Satan is yours as a gift which was purchased and won for you by Jesus with His cross and resurrection. You have been

redeemed and reconciled to God, "not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity" (*Small Catechism*).

It is Jesus the King who continues to perform His kingly deeds of salvation through His Word. The Good News of the reign and rule of God in Christ is proclaimed, announced, and shared. It is that Gospel, the gift given, that creates saving faith in the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit in those who hear the Word. It is the Gospel that delivers forgiveness of your sins and that grants eternal life. Where the Gospel is preached in its purity there is Christ among you with His reign and rule!

Like little children who are helpless to attain the basics of life, so you and I are helpless to attain forgiveness and eternal life. This must be given by Christ alone and received as the gift that it is. "Assuredly I say to you, whoever does not receive the reign of God like a little child shall surely not enter into it." It is through this Gospel that Christ invites all to believe in Him as King and Savior. It is Christ through the Gospel who invites you to receive the gift of His reign and rule that He has won for you. And He gives the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. This is how He accomplishes His work in bringing you into His kingdom. He brings you into His arms of mercy and places His nail-scarred hands of blessing upon you by the work of God the Holy Spirit in Word, Baptism, and Supper.

These Means of Grace are the means God has chosen to give you the forgiveness of sins and eternal life that are present in the reign and rule of Christ. Like children, we have nothing. We claim nothing. In the ancient world, remember, children were pretty much

considered nothing. But that's not how God considers us. He loved us with an everlasting love and gave us His Son, born as a child, to save us from sin and death. And in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, it is Christ who claims us as His own, as a child of the heavenly Father, and welcomes us into the reign and rule of God—by grace through faith alone.

Receiving the reign and rule of God through Baptism is receiving the blessings and benefits of the Gospel—forgiveness, rescue from death and the devil, eternal salvation. As James Voelz commented, "Children are, in fact, the 'perfect' recipients of Baptism, as it were, because they lay no claim to anything of their own." It is our text today that is read during the administration of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. The child passively receives God's mercy in the Gospel with the water applied in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Pastor Luther preached in 1525, "It seems to me that if any Baptism is certain, the Baptism of children should be most certain, just because of the words of Christ telling us to bring them, while the adults come on their own. . . . Christ makes His blessing effective in them, as He has commanded that they be brought to Him. These very striking words are not to be disregarded, when He tells us to bring the children to Him and rebukes those who hinder it."¹

Like the children brought to Christ, like children brought today at Christ's command to be Baptized, you and I continue to receive the blessings of Jesus' cross and resurrection in the Means of Grace, without any merit or worthiness in us. We live under God's reign and

¹ Benjamin T. G. Mayes, ed., *Martin Luther on Holy Baptism: Sermons to the People (1525-39)*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 2018), 12.

rule in Christ because Christ has brought that reign to us in the Gospel and sustains us under that rule by the Gospel and the Sacraments. Amen.