**November 14, 2021** “Kingdom Come”

Daniel 12: 1-3, Psalm 16, Hebrews 10: 11-25, Mark 13: 1-8

Each week in worship we say together the words of the Lord’s Prayer…

*Our Father…*

*Who art in heaven…*

*Hallowed be thy name…*

*Thy Kingdom come…*

As a child, growing up outside of the church, this phrase “Kingdom Come” was one I was familiar with, though not in a church or faith setting.

“Kingdom Come” seemed to me, from Saturday morning cartoons, and comic books, a place no one wanted to go.

“Come closer and I’ll sock you to Kingdom Come”

“If the bad guy gets his way, this city will be blown to Kingdom Come”

From these types of phrases, I concluded that Kingdom Come must be a bad place, a scary place.

It wasn’t until later, when I started praying the words of the Lord’s Prayer seriously, as an adult, that I realized that my first introduction to “Kingdom Come” was a bit off.

Kingdom Come isn’t a bad place.

Kingdom Come isn’t a scary place.

Kingdom Come is the new heaven and new earth! The new Israel! The renewed world that God is right now bringing into being!

Kingdom Come, far from being a place to fear, is in-fact, our hope made known in the resurrection life promised to us in the life, death, resurrection, and coming again of Jesus Christ.

And yet…

And yet for those disciples who walked with Jesus that day,

And for those of us who walk with Jesus these days.

I must admit, my old childhood self and those Saturday Morning cartoons did have one thing right: Kingdom Come, to our earthly mentality, to our limited understanding, *is something that scares us,* and despite our faith and our hope in the resurrection to come, it probably should.

Mark tells us that as the disciples were walking with Jesus out of the temple in Jerusalem one day, one of them looked up at the buildings all around them and exclaimed: “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!”

And even though we here in Saskatoon are starting to get some tall and impressive buildings just down the way at River Landing, I think we can find ourselves in this story a little better (and understand this feeling a little clearer) if we can remember a first visit in our own lives to a city like Toronto, or Chicago, or New York.

In your first visit to one of these places, you may have even said or heard words similar to the disciple: “Look, what big buildings! Look at these skyscrapers! Aren’t they amazing!”

So it was for this disciple who was looking at the tall and amazing buildings of the temple in Jerusalem:

*“Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!”*

Mark continues: *Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”*

And just for a moment, let’s appreciate what a bummer thing that must have been for the disciple to hear.

Imagine that you have landed in Toronto for the first time, and you take the Metro to the amazingly tall CN Tower, and as you crane your neck to look up, you say to the person next to you “What an amazing building!”

And he replies: “One day that whole thing will fall to the ground!”

Yeesh.

That would be hard for anyone to hear.

Yet, for the disciple, it was even more difficult; because the building in question (the temple) wasn’t just an impressive piece of architecture, but it was THE TEMPLE! God’s Holy Temple! His Holy seat in the land of Israel.

Now Jesus is saying it will be thrown down, stone by stone?

What could He mean?

Later on, Mark tells us that four disciples; Peter, James, John, and Andrew, approached Jesus on the Mount of Olives and they asked him about it:

*“Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished.”*

*Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.”*

The birth pangs of what?

God’s Coming Kingdom, Kingdom Come.

A place that must have seemed to those disciples in that moment very bad and scary indeed.

If you go to Jerusalem (and maybe you already have), you will no doubt notice that the Temple spoken of by Jesus that day is no longer there, other than a section of the old Western Wall (“The Wailing Wall”) the Temple in Jerusalem *was indeed* thrown down by the Romans, stone by stone, in 70 AD.

Last week, we welcomed a good friend of St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Rev. Dr. Ross Lockhart to lead us in worship, and during his sermon, he mentioned the seven journeys he has led Christians on to visit Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

A couple of years ago, I heard Ross tell a story from one of these travels, about when he was himself standing underground, before the foundation of the Temple below that one remaining wall.

Ross told us that if you go to Jerusalem and you go underground to the foundation of the Temple and stand before it, you get a real sense of how impressive it must have been to the disciples:

Huge stones, massive stones that look too heavy to be moved by 2000-year-old technology, all stacked one upon another, all perfectly straight and smooth, and perhaps most impressive of all, all set back evenly and perfectly so that as you look up, you can see the angled pitch of the wall and how impressive it must have been when it stood at its full height of 150 feet.

In those days described by Mark, when the whole Temple was still standing, if you stood at the bottom of the temple and looked up, at the pitched wall and the pinnacle of the Temple, 150 feet above you, it actually looked much higher. So much higher that you would have no doubt in your mind, that this truly was the dwelling place of the One God, the Living God of Israel.

What a truly terrible experience it must have been for those in Israel, when, in 70 AD, Roman soldiers stood at the top of that temple (in itself an act of defiance to God), and they threw down the stones, one by one until the Temple was no more.

Out of curiosity I did a little googling on this subject; and I learned that a stone, dropped from that height of 150 feet would take over three seconds to hit the ground.

 (One one thousand, two one thousand, three one thousand, crash) Over and over again, until all but one wall remained.

And perhaps the one wall that remains, the Western Wall, the Wailing Wall, was left not so much out of mercy or pity, but out of wrath by Titus, Rome’s Emperor, as a grim reminder of what had been destroyed and would not again be rebuilt on earth.

This historical event, the destruction of the Temple in 70AD (what other Gospel writers call “The Desolation Sacrilege”), raises a number of important questions for Christians around the historicity of the Gospels.

If Jesus’ foretelling of the destruction of the Temple *was* a foretelling of the event in year 70 (as seems self-evident), then what does that mean for us, still living in the birth pangs before Kingdom Come?

Why are the birth pangs taking so long? Why two-thousand years and more? How long must we wait for this place, this thing, this Kingdom Come, that still seems as foreign and scary to us as it did to the disciples?

Or perhaps the other possibility is true? Perhaps Jesus’ foretelling was *not* about what happened in 70 but was rather about something that is still yet to happen? In which case, we are *still* waiting helplessly for an even greater disaster and even worse birth pangs.

I once a read very self-assured atheist author who claimed that Christianity was nothing more than a two-thousand-year-old “Apocalyptic Jewish Cult.”

To this author, the Christian mysteries of time and history (such as this one), could all be neatly dismissed by reading Jesus’ words as nothing more than the foretelling of a very real and very limited event which happened 70 years after his death.

This author claimed that all that has followed in Christian history, all the signs of Kingdom Come, all of the other prophecies fulfilled, all of the pouring and re-pouring over the Book of Revelation has been a mistake, a misunderstanding of who Jesus was and what He was talking about.

If I lend as much legitimacy as I can to this author, if I accept his strange claim that Jesus could correctly predict events 70 years into the future but not further then I can (sort of) understand the point he was trying to make:

We Christians are an odd bunch, after all.

Every once in a while, some of us *do* get it into our heads that the “End is Nigh” that *this time* Kingdom *is truly* Come and we get excited about this date or another, and for the signs that we are sure are about to be revealed as the beginning of the end.

During these manic episodes, some Christians *do* look an awful lot like (for instance) those Q-Anon conspiracy theorists who gathered recently in Dallas, waiting for John F. Kennedy Jr. to return from the dead.

To be fair to critics of the Gospels, of Christ, of Christianity, we are a people who *are* waiting for the impossible to happen.

 For the trumpet to sound

 For Jesus to come back at the end of history

 For the wheat and the chaff to be separated, and

 For the faithful to dwell forever in the House of the Lord.

We have been both promised and warned:

Promised that these things are to take place eventually, and

Warned that, as Jesus Himself said,

“Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’and they will lead many astray.”

This “end of history” stuff… It *is* scary, it *is* confusing, but not for the reason that the world finds it to be so.

The world: that author I mentioned, those outspoken critics of Christian faith, those who think they *know better* than Scripture, each of these irreverent and sarcastic voices like to poke fun or hurl ridicule at a people who have the courage to have faith in something beyond themselves.

That’s easy; it’s easy to be dismissive of faithful people, to be scared of them.

But for those with the courage to come to Christ, to hear His prophecy, and His warning, and to wrestle with the questions of history and time and Kingdom Come, this whole arrangement is scary for a different reason, but a productive and faithful reason.

Put simply, Kingdom Come is scary for us (Christians) because it asks us to take seriously our grip on this world.

It asks us the serious and difficult question: What will you do?

What will you do when that trumpet sounds? What will you do when Christ comes again in glory? What will you do when those stones, that you thought would be fixed in place forever, suddenly come tumbling down, bringing with them all of the confidence you misplaced in the things of this world?

What will you do when the façade of this fallen world breaks apart, leaving Kingdom Come in its place?

And please hear me on this: as Christian people we need to get something straight, the correct word is not “if,” it is “when.”

However you choose to interpret this particular Scripture, however you choose to interpret Christ’s other prophecies, or the Book of Revelation, whatever you decide about whether 70AD was the beginning of the birth pangs or not, it is still “when.”

Because within all of these possibilities, within all of the signs and prophecies and interpretations, we cannot claim faith in Jesus Christ if we do not get one thing straight:

The stones of this world, the stones of our temples, *will* one day fall.

Maybe they have yet to be thrown.

Or maybe they have been thrown long ago and we are living our whole lives inside that three second gap between fall and crash.

The stones *will* fall.

The ways of this world *will* fail.

The things we have misplaced our trust in *will* crumble.

And unless we have faith in the one who foretold this fact, we will fall, and fail, and crumble with them.

And yet, as I have said, all of this (all of this possibility, all of this mystery, all of this fallen-ness, even all of this fear) can be pointed in a faithful and productive direction.

And not only this, not only can it be productive, not only can it be faith-building, but it can even help us to live into the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The Good News of this falling world, the Good News of this failing world, is that God has come in human flesh to show us another way.

To hear that this earthly world is falling, that it is failing, that it is crashing away, seems like bad and scary news, but *only* if we do not accept the help we have been offered by Christ.

Hearing what must take place for it to be ushered in (in this Scripture and others), Kingdom Come may seem as bad and scary a place as it seemed to me as a child, but only if we do not accept the hope and the faith Christ wants us to receive.

The help, the hope, the faith, the Good News of Kingdom Come is this:

*Despite the fact* that this world is failing

*Despite the fact* that those stones we have placed too much faith in are crumbling

*Despite the fact* that all of this fallen world will one day fall and crash away God has a purpose for the end of history

God has a purpose for the end of history.

Think about this for a moment: the end of the world will one day come, the end of life as we know it; all of those terrifying visions of apocalypse and Armageddon that fill our nightmares, it is indeed coming.

And yet God has a purpose even for this.

And not only does God have a purpose, not only does God have a purpose and a plan for all of this, but God’s plan is one of eternal life, and peace, and unity with Him and one another forever.

These things have been written, these things have been revealed to us, so that even in those times when we struggle to welcome Kingdom Come as Good News, we may yet understand why it is we do so.

Why it is we pray together each week

*Our Father…*

*Who art in heaven…*

*Hallowed be thy name…*

*Thy Kingdom come…*

When those disciples of Jesus heard for the first time the news of Kingdom Come and felt that fear in their hearts, it must have felt to them like the end of the world.

The Temple, God’s dwelling place, to be thrown down, to be crushed into rubble, where could God be in such a vision as this?

Friends, we who are also called by Christ are blessed to know the answer and the Good News of this mystery.

That not only is God present in this vision, but that He is the one bidding this Kingdom “Come.”

Amen.