

God's Vast Kingdom  
Sunday, August 2, 2020  
9<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Kingdomtide  
God's Absolute Truths Series Week #4  
Service of Holy Communion  
Matthew 13:31-33

How vast is God's kingdom? It's a fun question to ponder isn't it? In order to answer that question, we need to define what God's kingdom don't we? A geo-physical description might include the entire universe at the very least, right? How many of you had a chance to check out the Comet Neowise that was in the skies a couple of weeks ago? A comet that won't return into earth's view for another 6800 years! That's a vast universe isn't it!! This celestial entity traveling around in space for 6800 years!

But then God's kingdom includes heaven as well...how vast could heaven be if the universe is that big? Again, a fun idea to consider!

But how about God's kingdom reigning in our hearts and souls? Consider Paul's prayer to the church in Ephesus:

*"I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."*  
(Ephesians 3:17-19)

Paul is praying that the believers in Ephesus will be filled with God's love "to the measure of all the fullness of God." He is praying that they will grasp how wide, long, high, and deep God's love is for them. This too is a way for us to consider how vast God's kingdom is. This is actually the most important way for us understand how vast the kingdom of God is. If we don't personally experience God's expanding love on a personal level, then how vast the universe is doesn't really matter. We matter a whole lot more to God than the entire universe.

In the Gospel lesson today, Jesus describes the kingdom as something that expands like a tiny seed growing into a large tree. This gives us a physical description of how vast the kingdom is. Jesus also told the disciples that there are many rooms in his Father's house, so there is another description of how vast the

kingdom is. But in the second part of the parable, Jesus describes the kingdom like yeast being spread into flour and the expanding dough is another way to think about it. I really like this description because it captures the internal expansion of the kingdom. The yeast, in this case, symbolizes God's love, and as God's love touches the flour the whole dough begins to double. God's kingdom dwells within each of us, expanding our hearts, minds, and spirits.

But today, we may be struggling with understanding how vast God's love is for us. According to the many of the news agencies, America is in one of the most challenging seasons of our lives. I do wonder if this is true as I consider the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, the Great Depression, World War 2 and Civil Rights Movement in the 60-70's. This is a serious situation we are finding ourselves in for sure, but because we are in the middle of it, it's hard to say how bad it is by comparing it to other major events in our nation's history.

At the very least, the Coronavirus is the most serious event that has happened to us in 50 years. More than 152,000 people have died in our nation in the past 7 months with some kind of connection to the virus. That's a significant loss; about 5% of the nation's average death rate. This is comparable to all those people who die from stroke and other cerebrovascular diseases. (Medical News Today, Hannah Nichols and Vincent Tavella, MPH, July 4, 2019)

Because of the virus, there is a domino effect that is cascading in parts of our nation. The next domino to fall deals with our economy. A lot of people are out of work or have been furloughed, so they have lower incomes. The national debt is climbing with every month and piece of legislation Congress is passing. There may be long term effects from reduced investing, lower production and export rates which could have effects for the next couple of years.

The tipsy financial domino is creating some racial tumult in our culture. So those who are have not been able to work are lost. This is especially true if they have a superficial relationship with God. This could be God's plan, to awaken those folks who have been working so hard they have neglected their relationship with God.

Most folks don't like conflict or chaos and the Coronavirus has created a fair amount of this. We can see how something so small—germs from a cough or sneeze spreading everywhere is having a huge impact on the world.

But the kingdom of God reigns over the conflict and chaos. We may be experiencing what Paul described in his letter to the Romans:

*"...the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the minds of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:26-28)*

God is already at work through research scientists to government agencies to pharmaceutical companies to develop an antidote for this despicable disease. Again it will be an amalgamation of microscopic organisms that will be the healing agent or will create a vaccine that will protect us from the serious disease.

Life is hard right now... but we who are believers in a good God, have the one true thing we can rely on, the one true thing we can count on: God's love for us and how vast that love truly is. If we think that our country was so great before the pandemic hit, then we've been living with rose colored glasses for a while.

As Christ followers, we have an opportunity to look through God's eyes to see what we can improve to advance his kingdom on earth. This pandemic is actually an opportunity for us to grow in our faith in God in a personal, relationship way, but also as the body of Christ on earth.

One person can make a difference much like a tiny seed. Ruby Bridges and her family made a big difference, one day at a time, as she walked into that all white school breaking down the segregation barriers. There are others who carried their crosses as well: Rosa Parks with her bus boycott; TC Williams, a football coach in Alexandria Va; Jackie Robinson in the National Baseball League; The Tuohy family from Tennessee adopting Michael Oher. These peoples' stories are inspiring and have been the yeast in our culture expanding God's kingdom into all kinds of places.

Today, we celebrate Holy Communion. We are about to partake Christ's body and blood as our spiritual meal to strengthen our spirits and our relationship with God. This little bit of grape juice and this small cracker with the mysterious power of the Holy Spirit can spread God's love into our bodies and lives; which helps us to see, hear, and understand what's happening from God's perspective. Once we see, hear, and understand we are in a better position to hear God's guidance and wisdom and to be obedient. This small piece of the kingdom's banquet taken frequently empowers us to spread God's love in vast ways to touch many people's lives to extend God's kingdom during our lifetime.

God's vast kingdom is a place where his love is experienced the way that Paul described it: *"how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."* God's kingdom begins in our souls, with our lives, and spreads into everyone else's lives that we interact with. In this way it has spread from one generation to the next; and it's this same way that it will spread to the coming generations too.

It is my prayer that this message sustains and nurtures your faith in our loving good God. Amen.