

Amen. The word of God that we consider today is from Matthew 4: *“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’*

“Thy Kingdom Come.” We pray these words often; perhaps several times in the same day. “May your kingdom come, Lord.” But what does it mean? What would it look like for the kingdom of heaven to come? And God’s kingdom is not first and foremost a political unit with geographical borders. Think of it more in terms of the *reign* of God. His reign is active, dynamic, and not confined to one place. So what would it look like for God to reign in the world? What immediate changes would God make? Maybe he would start by eliminating the threat of nuclear war. Maybe he would start with eliminating cancer and other terminal illnesses. Maybe God would begin his reign by solving the problems of hunger or lack of access to clean water. Regardless of the exact shape it takes, we’re pretty confident God’s reign will change life as we know it in some big and awesome ways.

But the truth is God’s kingdom is already here; his reign has already begun. Jesus’ message was exactly that: the kingdom of heaven stands near! The 2017 edition of the Small Catechism asks an excellent question: “If God ushered in His kingdom through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, why do we still see so many problems in the world today?” Why aren’t we seeing those big awesome changes with God in the driver’s seat? And the catechism also supplies a solid answer: “As Christians, we believe and confess that Christ’s present (*but hidden*) reign as King is being extended by the Spirit through the Gospel. It will be fully revealed when Christ returns in glory.”

If we were to ask the question, *“When is God’s Kingdom Coming?”* The answer would be twofold: already and not yet. Jesus already kicked it off, and 2) Jesus has not yet returned to reveal the full extent of his reign.

So what *does* the reign of look like that is already here? Jesus gave us a pretty good picture of what his reign looks like. It all started in Galilee. Galilee would not have been considered a particularly important region at the time. Matthew quotes Isaiah’s prophecy referring to it as “Galilee of the Gentiles.” It was not the heart of Israel. It lay in the northernmost reaches of the kingdom; the borderlands where Jews intermingled with Gentile foreigners. From this remote place, God promised light would shine. The arrival of God’s kingdom looked like warm, bright light suddenly illuminating a cold, dark, wasteland. *“The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”* The people dwelling in darkness and the shadow of death is really all people enslaved by sin and doomed to its curse, which is death. But it was especially so for the Gentiles who were not yet fully included in

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 God's people. But the light that began to shine from Galilee would penetrate beyond the borders of Israel and include the Gentiles as well. So God's kingdom coming looks like Jesus rescuing all people from sin and death!

And what did God's kingdom sound like? It sounded like the voice of Jesus. The Word started sounding from Galilee: *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. The preaching of Jesus would be another hallmark of God's reign. Everywhere he went, Jesus' actions were coupled with preaching this core message. He would elaborate on it in parables and sermons and personal conversations but it all revolved around this central point: Turn away from sin because the gracious reign of heaven is here and Jesus is its King.

As we read on, the first thing Jesus would do in his public ministry is recruit some fishermen to be his disciples; his followers. And he would in turn make them recruiters of more followers; fishers of men. That was the way God's reign was to be extended. Not by military conquest or political deal brokering but by word of mouth; disciples sharing good news and recruiting more disciples.

The final section of today's Gospel reading gives us a palpable image of life under God's gracious reign. Jesus continued to proclaim the gospel but these were no empty words. He began to enact the gospel message in healing diseases and afflictions and casting out demons wherever he traveled. Beginning in Galilee, the King began to demonstrate his deep love. It is important to remember that Jesus didn't just come to forgive sins but to save his people *from* their sins. This meant Jesus forgave sin but also restored those aspects of people's lives that were defaced by it. Diseases and infirmities entered the world with sin but Jesus reversed those effects. Demons set up their own little kingdoms as their influence prevailed on the people dwelling in darkness. Jesus came to wrestle control out of their claws and re-establish God's rightful place in the hearts of his people. All of this was just the beginning of God's reign. It is summarized well in an old hymn by Percy Dearmer. If you heard the tune, you would be thanking Riley for talking me out of having us sing it today. Stanza 3 says, "*He came, (God's Word) to the world here below; And round him there did gather A band who found that **this teacher** to know Was e'en to know the Father: He healed the sick who sought him, Forgave the foes who fought him; Beside the sea Of Galilee He set the nations free.*"

The light and love that began to emanate from Galilee would shine its brightest at Calvary. It was there that King Jesus laid the cornerstone of his kingdom – though it lacked the appearance of power and glory. His head adorned with a crown of thorns, he was nailed to a cross to die; but that cross silently beamed the truth to all the onlookers: Jesus of Nazareth, KING of the Jews. Jesus *is* the King and *this* is exactly what his kingdom is all about – God sacrificing his only Son in the place of sinners; God loving us with a love that conquered sin, death, and all satan's demonic forces for us. The last verse of that hymn go, "And sometimes trumpets from Sion ring out, And tramping comes, and drumming; "Thy kingdom come," so we cry; and they shout, "It

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comes!" and still 'tis coming. Far, far ahead, to win us, Yet with us, nay within us; Till all shall see That King is  
he, The Love from Galilee!"

Jesus began shining light and love from Galilee and that light and love would find its way back to Galilee. On Sunday morning, some women among Jesus disciples came to his tomb only to find it empty and be greeted by an angel who told them, *"Go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him."* And from Galilee where it all began, Jesus ascended, leaving those fishers of men with a mission to make disciples of all nations. The light shining on Galilee of the Gentiles was now to begin illuminating the world. God's gracious reign was to be extended over every person.

Now what does God's Kingdom coming look like today? The things Jesus began to say and do are still the hallmarks of God's reign among us today. Light is still shining on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death. After all these years since Christ was taken up, God has still not given up on us! He continues to hold out the good news for us. Also, the core of what we preach today is still the same as what Jesus started with: *repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. We preach repentance because we are still sinners and we still need to hear the law calling out our sin and turning us back to God. But we also preach Gospel: Jesus is here; the kingdom is here, and he has extended his reign over you. And the church continues to follow Jesus' pattern of disciples making more disciples. Not everyone is called to be a fisher of men; not everyone is a pastor or a missionary. But we all participate in the task – some repair the nets; some steer the boat; some do the actual pulling in of the nets.

Now what about that whole thing about healing diseases and infirmities and casting out demons? We don't see much of that anymore do we? We have to be careful not to preach the false hope that if we just believe hard enough, God will give us physical healing right now! At the same time, we should recognize that these things *can and do* still happen! Physical and spiritual healing still occurs by means of medicine and pastoral care but miracles are also still possible! When we pray, "Thy Kingdom Come," we should realize that we are praying a big prayer and be open to God doing big things. I'll leave you with these words from biblical scholar Jeff Gibbs: *"we must not live, preach, and pray as if the kinds of melodies and miracles in our text only happened back then – when we pray, "they kingdom come, "who knows how the risen and reigning Christ may answer, even as the promised final healing and fulfillment of the Day of the reign of God continue to tarry?"*

We look with joyful hope to the day when Jesus will complete what he began beside the Sea of Galilee.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.  
Amen.