

We have heard or maybe even used the adage, “Be careful what you wish/pray for. It might come true.” I thought of this this past week as I watched, read and listened to the news. There has been quite a bit written about the “false” news sites that are popping up on the internet, etc. Some of the stories begin with a grain of truth and then are distorted to fit the view of the writer or group responsible. Others are just downright lies. (Remember when it was just the National Enquirer and it was filled mostly with stories of space aliens!?) What should be more upsetting is that many people are inclined to believe these false stories because it fits in with their beliefs or agenda. They seldom, if ever, check to see if there is any truth to them. It fits their image of...

As Jesus taught his followers how to pray, he included these words: “*Your kingdom come, your will be done.*” Do we really know what we are praying when we say these words?

Israel was not happy about the future. Samuel was growing old and his sons had not followed in his steps. They were corrupt. The people wanted a change, they wanted a king (I Samuel 8). Israel wants someone who will judge and lead them fairly. Thus, they request a king, “*Appoint for us, then, a king to govern us*” 8:5. Samuel saw this as a rejection of his leadership but God told Samuel that this was not a rejection of him but a rejection of God. “*They have not rejected you, but have rejected me from being King over them*” (8:7). God gives them what they want after having Samuel warn them of the consequences: inscription into the army, taxes, etc. They want to be like every one else. They want a king. All their kings were imperfect.

Isaiah sees a day when the perfect king appears. The yoke of oppression will be lifted. The coming king will wear many hats: Wonderful Counselor, a Mighty God, an Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace. His rule will be one of righteousness and justice - it will be a peaceful kingdom. He will not rule in the place of God, he will be God. Isaiah continues his vision in chapter 11 with more of the ideal image of this coming king. Enemies will dwell together in peace. The cow and bear will graze together and the lion and lamb will dwell in peace. Children will be safe even from the adder. His reign will be forever. Of his kingdom there will be no end. These are images of hope. Hope for a better tomorrow - God’s kingdom comes in hope.

Jesus said, when you pray, pray, “*Your (God’s) kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*” What are we praying? Christ has come, Advent celebrates the coming of the king - God, with us. But, is this the kingdom they had expected?

They wanted the mountains to tremble, the earth to shake and lightning flash - what they got was a baby’s cry in Bethlehem and angels singing to shepherds.

They wanted an exclusive kingdom - but the coming king wanted and promoted a kingdom that would include anyone who would come.

They wanted to keep the religion pure and developed rules to insure its purity - he called sinners rather than saints.

They wanted judgment - he chose grace.

They wanted riches, power and prestige - he chose submission and the cross.

Their ideal and the reality of God’s kingdom never quite meshed. Their image of God and God’s reality were worlds apart - most could not comprehend such a king.

What is your/our image of God's kingdom? What are we expecting? We call him Prince of Peace and yet more wars have been fought in his name than in any other name. We still try to force people into his kingdom when he loved us into it. We pass laws that we think will get us a pat on the back rather than extend the love and grace he came to demonstrate. I wonder if we still long for the God that we envision in the Old Testament. An angry God who brings judgment and wrath.

Part of my responsibility last Sunday at the Community Thanksgiving service was to read the passage chosen from Deuteronomy 11:1-11. As the people are called to celebrate God's provision and bounty in the new land God gives these directions, "*Then together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, you shall celebrate with all the bounty the Lord your God has given you...*" (11:11). Did you notice that all who are in the land are to share in the bounty, including the aliens. These are the foreigners, the strangers. The bounty of God is to be provided for all.

There are some who are rightfully concerned about how we treat our servicemen and women, our elderly, the homeless in our land. They are also concerned about the aliens in the land - what they may or may not be getting in the way of government assistance. It is for many an either/or when it really should be a both/and. If a few billionaires gave up a billion or two we could get the job done. If we stopped paying actors and sports heroes millions of dollars to entertain us, we could get the job done without any increase in our taxes, etc. If we really brought God's kingdom to earth there would be none who would stand in need.

God's concern is for the whole world - not for any one particular people or nation. It is easy to hand pick certain passages of judgment and neglect the ones that call for grace. God brought light to a world in darkness and we are called to be the bearers of that light to the world. What did God say in Isaiah 55? "*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters, and you who have no money; come, buy and eat, without cost.*" God's yoke is easy, God's burden is light - God's yoke is love.

What would our world be like if God's kingdom was here now? What if we walked, talked and lived the way Jesus called us to? What if we stopped trying to explain away some of Jesus' actions as if they were for another time (Scofield) or only spiritual? What if we started acting like the redeemed people of the kingdom of God? Those who have been forgiven and redeemed and loved. The Advent Candle we lit today is the candle of Hope. Hope for the world. Hope found in a manger. Hope delivered via a cross.

Our closing hymn is a repeat of our opening hymn, "Hope for the World" — friends, that hope is us — those who hope in Jesus.

NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1988