Inheritance in Light

Ephesians 1:3-23 Kimby Young

Revelation 22:1-5 November 3, 2024

Isaiah 58:8-10

An inheritance is something received from past generations. It can be possession or property, but it can also be a genetic trait or condition, a quality of character, or a right or responsibility. I have my mother’s voice, cheekbones and chin. I have my father’s hair and nose and tendency to let my emotions show. I have both of their love and faithfulness. An inheritance can be passed on biologically from parent to child, or it can be given by adoption or election choice. The Bible is filled with passages about adoption – God’s choice of us, God’s love for everyone, and our choice to receive and live into that grace of God. We are called children of God and therefore receive all the rights and responsibilities of that family. We inherit everything God gives. Everything. We who choose to follow Jesus Christ are heirs to the kingdom of God – full heirs – receiving, belonging, owning, living in the kingdom of God. God’s world is our world. God’s gifts are our gifts.

The thing about the kingdom of God – the realm of God, the place where God is in charge – that kingdom exists on more than one level – in heaven and on Earth. We often think of the kingdom of God as heaven – the place we go when we die, the place where our beloved dwell who have gone before us. We imagine pearly gates and golden streets and angels with harps – or on a more modern level – I imagine music and flowers and colors and light – seeing the people I love, talking to my dad, singing with my mom, dancing with my granddaddy, hearing my sister laugh again – and of course eating all the chocolate I want. The image of the banquet feast is all over the Bible. People will come from east and west and north and south to sit at table in the kingdom of heaven. To hungry people, to people who have to work for every scrap of bread – just imagine the feast God offers. To those of us who have potlucks and family gatherings and reunions and thanksgiving feasts – just imagine the family table in God’s homecoming party. We love the images about light and hospitality and joy in God’s presence. And we can only imagine.

That’s what we do – every time we spread this table for communion. We imagine the banquet feast, we remember the blessings of God, and we celebrate all God’s gifts to all God’s people. The little square of bread and the little cup of juice is not enough to feed us – we know that. But it is enough, to feed our imaginations, to fill our souls, to remind us of the presence of Jesus Christ in our lives, and to nourish us into whatever call God has waiting for us. It is enough to give us the strength and the gifts we need to move forward. It is enough to unite us with Christians of every time and every place, even those who have gone before, even those we are missing and grieving, and imagining in heaven. In this feast at this table – they are with us as Christ is with us. The saints gather around this table of grace, each time we gather in remembrance of Jesus. They are with us as Christ is with us. And we are filled with the light of eternal life. As you receive the elements of bread and juice today, remember your inheritance in the kingdom of God, and give thanks for all the gifts of God’s grace you have received.

These gifts, our inheritance from God – goes far beyond just “getting to heaven someday.” Our inheritance from God also goes beyond material needs - property or possession. We also inherit gifts for here and now. We have inherited characteristics from God. Since we are in the image of God, we are to reflect the nature of God. We receive from God goodness, kindness, joy, compassion, wisdom, righteousness, justice, creativity, energy, power and purpose. If we truly reflect God, we shine like lights in the world to give hope to others – to lead other people to God. We have inherited from God the ability to transform, to touch as Jesus touched, to bring healing and wholeness to the world. Sometimes we don’t believe that of ourselves. I can’t do what Jesus did. But look at the scripture from Ephesians. God says we can. God says it is our destiny – to love as Jesus loved and to bring glory to God. It is our purpose – our inheritance – God’s gift to us – to make a difference in the world and to bring people to God. It is our inheritance now, as well as in the future in heaven, to live in the light of God and to share God’s love.

God’s kingdom is in heaven. But God’s kingdom is also here and now. Remember the kingdom of God is the place where God is in charge. And if we are followers of Jesus Christ, then God is already in charge of our lives and we live in the kingdom of God now. We must live now as if we are already in heaven – “on earth as it is in heaven.” Of course, that doesn’t mean harps and angels and pearly gates. But it means everything else that recognizes God with us in the world. It means working for peace where there is no peace. It means living for justice in the face of oppression. It means helping those who are in need. It means making this world a better place – because it is this world God loves.

Because not only have we inherited gifts from God, and characteristics from God. We have inherited responsibility from God. In the old days when a good king or queen or lord passed on a title as inheritance, with the inheritance came the responsibility of caring for the people under their realm. So it is with us. We inherit God’s purpose of caring for the world and all God’s people. That’s what the reading from Isaiah was talking about. Loose the bonds of injustice, let the oppressed go free, share your bread… share your bread with the hungry. And all in order to point toward the light and to bring people to God.

The last of the scripture passages for today from Revelation is often thought to be talking about heaven – a long time from now after we are all dead and gone. When everyone is gathered around the throne of God at the end of time – when there is no more sorrow, or loss, or pain, or suffering – when we will all see God face to face. And yes that is part of the prophecy of the book of Revelation. But the original author, John of Patmos, was really talking about the kingdom of God on Earth. He was really trying to give courage to Christians living in this world in the face of persecution and injustice and intolerance and suffering and need. The vision of Revelation is not only of heaven and a time when we can rest. The vision is also of this world made new – this world transformed by the love of God. It is a challenge for Christians to bring God’s gifts to work in the world and to live as if God is in charge – to live in the light of Christ. Here and now – to live in the light. Let us honor the saints we remember today. Let us honor all those faithful who have gone before. Let us honor them, by living into our inheritance with the saints in light. By the grace of Jesus Christ. Amen.