Sermon Jan 21, 2024

Third Epiphany

Title: “This, *Then*, That”

Texts: Jonah 3:1-5, 10; 1 Cor. 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20

Prayer

**“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the Gospel.”**

**Salutation**

**I**

 **The three texts today fit together like a hand in glove. When you pull a work glove into your hand it should fit comfortably and not too loosely or too tightly, so that when a task is being done, it can be done easily and not painfully. When this is done, then that is accomplished, and work can be done. Gloves are a helpmate.**

 **Thus, *This* is for our texts. Jonah is told to go to Ninevah---again. We well know what happened the first time God told Jonah to go, for he ended up being spit out on a beach by a great fish. He had not put his work gloves on correctly and they didn’t fit. However, God gave Jonah a second chance this time to bring the people there a chance as well. In effect, to bring them the Good News that if they did this- repent- then that- forgiveness- would be done. Their time would be very short if they didn’t listen, and they would be destroyed. But change came and they were restored.**

 ***Then* in the Epistle, Paul tells the Corinthians the same thing, that time is short. The kingdom of heaven is at hand and gloves need to be put on to spread the Good News. That change is going to come, but first this, ---repentance- that in receiving the Good news, then they would be restored and welcomed into Christ’s Kingdom.**

***That* is also what is found in the Gospel text as well. Jesus goes to Galilee to preach the Gospel of God and there proclaims this: That the kingdom is at hand, and *this* must be done- one must repent in order to receive that kingdom so that then *this* can happen. And then, He called His first disciples to put on those work gloves and follow Him.**

**All three texts tell of repentance. All three restoration. All three of spreading the Gospel that says, yes, God does this for His repentant people.**

**II**

**In that brief synopsis, you’d think I’d have covered it well enough for me to stop now. Not going to happen. If you don’t see any similarities to those three situations and us today, you have been living under a rock. Indeed, our nation, is much like Ninevah, Corinth and even, Galilee, where people still don’t listen to God and sin with abandon. We are like that. Individually and collectively. I hear all the time that we Americans can’t go on like this! When will people repent so that our land can be healed? And I’d like to offer you an illustration that shows the premise that if *this is done then that* will happen.**

 **I watch a youtube channel called SB Mowing. I must say that I find it very satisfying when I do watch it. The man on the channels’ name is Spencer. He seems to be a selfless individual, who goes around to find the most overgrown and awful yards in the area and then cuts them for the owner for free. These places are so overgrown that sometimes you can’t see any defining features, the sidewalks, driveways and sometimes even the homes! These places have returned to the wild. However, Spencer rolls up his sleeves, puts on his gloves and gets to work. He mows, edges the concrete surfaces, weed eats, and even trims the trees. He brings these yards back from a sure death and makes them new. He restores those yards to their former glory. If weeds are removed, then yards are restored. All for free.**

**III**

**So, it is for us. When we sin, another weed grows in us. And we think, “No need to put on our gloves. I can pull that weed by myself without gloves.” And we go on sinning that same sin. However, when we tried to pull the plant the last time, we left the roots because we hadn’t put on our gloves. We didn’t use our helpmate. And we sin again, and the plant becomes so large, and the roots become so deep and firm only one thing can pull it, the hand of God when He hears us repent. He restores our souls to their former glory.**

**In what way? The Good News is that when He looks at *us*, those that have followed His Son, those of us who are His baptized bride, He looks through those weeds and sees- Jesus. He sees the righteousness of His Son, who came and restored the Kingdom. The kingdom of God’s grace and restoration. He sees His Son who came to live in the weeds, grew none, and died on a barren Hill to rid us of them. That’s what the Father sees. And we who understand this, those of us who believe the Gospel, know that there are no conditions. It is all for free. Because God loves us and has offered this to the World, He wants all men to be restored.**

**IV**

**The last part of that Gospel text talks about Jesus calling His first disciples. The first men He asked to follow Him and put on their gloves for the work of preaching the Gospel. It takes work to get it out there. It takes men and women like you and me to tell people about the kingdom. And don’t get me wrong, this whole thing is not about works-righteousness. We won’t go to heaven for paying it forward and clearing weeds for free. We do these things because we love the Lord and what He has done. We do these things because He has saved us from these sins, the certain death that goes with them and has given us- eternal life! And we want to share this faith with others as Christ has given us to do.**

**Conclusion**

**Spencer shares what God has given him. And you know what, I don’t even know if he’s a Christian! He’s never shared that with me or his viewers, at least as far as I know. However, I did see that he had a Christmas tree at his house this year. But, if he’s not, he’d sure make a good one! For as a man, I judge him by his works, which are evidence of faith. He’s not afraid to put on his gloves and help others. I commend him for it. However, even if he’s a righteous dude, which he certainly is, he still needs restoration every week, just like us. We come here to be refreshed by the promises of God. If he is not a Christian, or a practicing one, I invite him to learn more about the Savior. And if he watches this, he needs to let the world know what he is, which is also the other half of showing your faith. So, if you love to see weeds chopped up without mercy, watch him sometime. It is very satisfying to see restoration come. And God loves that.**

**Therefore, after hearing all of this, you can see that all these texts follow a pattern. This, our sharing of the condition of sinful man, is then only restored through repentance, so that, the forgiveness of sins may occur, and we become “weed free”! All through Jesus Christ who restores repentant sinners to His glory in His kingdom. Thanks be to God!**

**May the peace of God that surpasses all of our understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.**