

This morning marks the beginning of a new journey. It is our first Sunday together. I'm excited—I hope you're excited.

I must admit, when I pictured this moment, I never pictured myself spending my first week here battling allergies and asthma, conjunctivitis and—of all things—thrush! But hey—God just loves to throw those curveballs. I think God thinks it makes my life more interesting..

But a new journey here has begun. New journey's are exciting—new things coming, new experiences... but new things sometimes prompt us to remember old things, old journeys—the people who were previously our companions on the way. And that's just fine. These people have all been in our lives for a reason. They are part of the tapestry that is our life. We are in this world to discover our potential—our potential to do things, our potential to love, our potential to grow.

“Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, curing every disease, and every sickness. When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them...”

Jesus was having all kinds of new journey's, new experiences—meeting new people—but his response was always the same: he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom, healed people, had compassion.

So what is this good news of the kingdom? I'm tempted to get into a dialogue sermon—right here, right now—but I don't want to scare you too much on my first Sunday.

What is the good news of the kingdom the gospel talks about in this passage? This is important, because Jesus asks the disciples to spread the good news of the kingdom a LOT in the gospels.

It seems to be all about the kingdom of God, and the people, compassion—all jumbled together, but how?

It had to be a very different message than what all the other wandering prophets—and there were quite a few of them--- were talking about. And why do historians—theologians---think Jesus' message was so radically different? Because it's **remembered**. Jesus' words are still remembered in the 21st century.

But in the 21st century we live by an ethos of individualism.

- Every man for himself.
- Pull ourselves up by our bootstraps.
- What's in it for me?

It's even permeated our modern religion for the last 100 or so years---

- Jesus is my personal Lord and Savior.

Individualism can be good if it leads us to remember that we are each beloved of God. God loves each one of us—all our quirks and our differences. But individualism is not as helpful when it becomes *all about us*, and it causes us **only** to look for our own good, and to look away from others, away from the ways every thing and every body in this world are connected.

Separating ourselves from others is not what it means to be the Kingdom of God. The kingdom of God embraces everyone. Jesus died for sin of the whole world, not just our personal sin.

In fact, when we think of salvation in any other terms than as a sacrifice for the sin of the whole world—we become obsessed with who's in and who's out. I suspect God will handle what happens to everyone after we die. It really isn't up to us at all, who goes where.

We are here to learn two things, and two things only. We are here to learn to love God with all our being.

We are here to learn to love our neighbor as ourself.

Another way of saying that is to say that we are here to love God, and to learn to have compassion for people.

To be compassionate towards someone isn't to be sympathetic to their plight, to sympathize with them. Our English word compassion comes from two Greek words Cum and Passio. Passio means suffering, Cum means with, so – when you put it together --compassion means to suffer with someone. We are here to learn

compassion. We are here to learn to literally love all people so much that we suffer with them when they suffer.

The purpose of the Christian life, life in Christ, is to become more and more compassionate beings.

How? We ask God to open our hearts.

We ask God to help us see others—not as enemies-- but as part of the whole. We ask God to help us learn to suffer with people, not to judge them. Believe me, we don't need any help in learning to judge more. But I think we do sometimes need help with opening our hearts. We are very protective of that organ, but we are born to learn that in Christ's kingdom, the heart is our secret weapon, that which gives us great strength.

The kingdom of God isn't someplace far away— just a place we get to when we die. Jesus never talks about the kingdom of God in the future tense—“The kingdom of God WILL be like.... A glorious banquet!”

No—Jesus talks about the kingdom in the present tense: “the kingdom of God is within you. The kingdom of God is among you. Spread the good news of the Kingdom. The kingdom IS.

God became incarnate to help us understand that the kingdom of God is now, God's power is now, God's love is now—and we, as his people, are being transformed in God to bring about the kingdom—NOW. Will it be difficult, probably. Will it be dangerous—it could be. Will it be exciting--- you bet.

It's the journey we all take with each other that begins when we're born, and continues with changes, and challenges—throughout our life.

We follow Christ to change the world. We follow Christ to be transformed into People of Compassion. People connected to humanity through God. Kingdom people.

And that journey will be an adventure. I can't wait to begin the newest part of my journey into the kingdom-- with you.

Amen.