
Imagining the Kingdom

**A sermon by the Rev. Canon David Boyd
The Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year C**

Imagine, if you will, Easter morning. Not the first Easter, nor this past Easter, but the last Easter morning.

Imagine, in the darkness of the grave, hearing your name called, feeling the rush of the Holy Spirit, seeing the light of the new dawn.

Imagine rising up and seeing a grand parade of happy souls triumphantly processing home. Home to heaven. Home to Eden.

And imagine joining in that procession, shouting Alleluia, shouting triumphant taunts: "Where O death is thou sting?"

Imagine marching up to the gates of the garden. The angel has laid down his flaming sword, the curtain has been torn, the way is open.

And what would you see as you step into Eden? Perhaps, like the Dean, you find yourself in a quiet corner of Cowetta County. Or perhaps you feel St. Simons sand between your toes. Or maybe the Easter procession has led you back here to the Cathedral. Wherever heaven is, wherever home is, what do you see?

Perhaps you see people beating swords into plowshares, you hear the clang of metal on metal, the sharp edges of war turned to tools of nature's nurture. The hum of conflict quieted into the rustle of fields being sown in peace.

Perhaps you see lions and lambs lying down together, not as predator and prey, but as fellow creatures, reconciled at last. All creation untwists itself from fear and stretches out into delight.

Perhaps you see a great multitude that no one can count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, waving palm branches and singing in one voice. You recognize your neighbor there. You recognize your enemy there. You recognize yourself, renewed and transformed.

Perhaps you see a table, long and laughing, spread beneath the trees of life. There's no more hunger, no more thirst, and no one left out. The Lamb is at the center, both host and feast, and he knows your name. He's already saved your seat.

Perhaps you see the Shepherd walking among the flock, wiping away every tear, and not just drying them, but making it so there's no more reason to cry.

Or perhaps you see only light. Light unfiltered, light undimmed, light flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb, illuminating every corner of creation, even the shadowy places you thought were beyond redemption.

I wonder what the Kingdom of God looks like to you?

And what do we do with this vision?

We rehearse it. As Christians, we rehearse Revelation, in our worship, in our service, in our very lives.

If heaven on earth is where we're headed, this wild harmony of all peoples and creatures and places, then why would we wait until death to begin living it?

I'll tell you the truth: I find myself losing patience with a world that seems more interested in policing purity than practicing paradise. I have little use for a world obsessed with drawing lines and building walls while the Shepherd is still calling out across the hillside, gathering in the flock.

My deepest prayer is to be counted among the Father's flock. I have no need to be counted with the realists and the cynics, the calloused and the cowered. No, I want to be known by the voice of the Shepherd, caught up with the dreamers and the naive, the innocent hopeful among us. I want my life to move in rhythmic time with Christ: laying down power, lifting up the lowly, walking straight into the valley of the shadow of death without fear, because of the knowledge of who walks beside me.

God's Revelation to John reminds us that we are not called to be gatekeepers. We are called to be tour guides of the Kingdom. We are not called to sit in judgment, but to stand in the crowd, waving our palm branches, pointing to the Lamb and saying, "Look! There he is! That's the one who has brought us home."

So why not begin practicing paradise now, in this place, with this life? Christ enables us to rehearse Revelation here and now, as if the angel has laid down his flaming sword, as if the tomb is still empty, as if the song of heaven already resonates in our bones.

In today's Gospel, the crowd says to Jesus, "*If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.*" In the afterglow of Easter, we can thank God Jesus already has, plainly, persistently, not just in words, but in signs and in love. The problem isn't that Jesus is unclear. The problem is that his kind of Messiah doesn't fit our worldly expectations. He doesn't come with legions or lightning. He comes as a Good Shepherd, calling by name, gathering the vulnerable, laying down his life. That's not what the world is looking for and so the world doubts it's real.

And when sin and death still press in around us, we start to wonder if maybe the crowds were right to be skeptical. We might think, *if he really were the Messiah, wouldn't the wolves be gone by now? Wouldn't the darkness have lifted?*

The presence of sin and sorrow is not proof of Christ's failure. The cross does not interrupt the kingdom; it reveals it, opening the way home. The scars in Christ's hands are not signs of weakness, but of a love that would not quit even unto death. Too often, the first glimpse of so-called failure sends us spiraling into cynicism, abandoning the kingdom for the cold comfort of realism. But the gospel dares to tell us: do not give up so easily. The Shepherd still calls. You are still counted among the Father's flock. Rejoice, for the Kingdom is coming.

Again, I say rejoice! Rejoice, for the Lamb is already seated on the throne. Rejoice, for The Spirit is already moving. Rejoice, for the way home is already open. Amen.