



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, AUGUST 10, 2025
GENESIS 15:1-6; PSALM 33:12-22; HEBREWS 11:1-3, 8-16; LUKE 12:32-40

A BETTER COUNTRY

Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16 *[Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old-- and Sarah herself was barren-- because he considered him faithful who had promised. There fore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, "as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore." All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.]*

What makes a place home? Is it where we come from, or where we live now? What do you think of as home? For some, home isn't necessarily a place. It's wherever we hold what we treasure most – whether that's our family, our memories, or both. It's where we find refuge and rest, where we are welcomed and know we belong. Home can be a relationship or a community as much as a place. When something

comes close to us, to the center of our being, we say it hits home. For the most part, leaving home is fun when we know we can go back. When we don't know if we'll ever go home again, the pain of losing it can feel unbearable.

I wonder where Abraham called home. Today's reading from Hebrews has an answer for that; but I wonder how long it took him to get there. I wonder when

he stopped looking back to Ur, the land of his childhood, or Haran, where he buried his father, or the oaks of Mamre, where he buried his wife. If it's home, we usually know how to get back – even if we have no desire to return. But in Abraham's case, God says that from now on – home will be ahead of him. God's promises change the direction of his life forever. His homeland, his better country, is now in front of him – not behind. For the rest of his life, he'll only be able to catch it in glimpses, like stars poking holes through the night sky.

Jesus had a way of talking about this home, this better country. He called it the kingdom of God. And unlike some countries we might think of, we don't have to buy our way into it or risk our lives to get there or fight like hell to stay there, because it's already ours. As Jesus puts it in today's Gospel, it is God's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. The gift's already been given; we just need to walk toward it.

Well, that feels like good news – in part, because many of us are afraid of what's happening to the country we live in now. We are supposed to be a land of welcome, of refuge and rest for those who need a new home. Even if we never fully lived up to that promise, what we

can and should be seems shrouded now by violence and greed and fear. We all need a better country, don't we?

So then, how do we get there? At first, Jesus' suggestions don't make much sense. He tells us to sell our possessions and give to the poor and not worry so much about the kinds of things thieves can steal. What kind of future does that secure? According to Jesus at least, sharing the necessities of life with the vulnerable – food, shelter, health care – builds a treasure that's beyond the reach of thieves and tyrants. It's the wisest investment we can make because it makes visible the kingdom of God – where everyone has a place to call home.

It's easier to work for something when we have a sense of what it looks like. Elsewhere in the Bible, we're given a vision of the kingdom of God that includes those from every tribe and language and people and nation. In this better country, our maps and borders are revealed as the violently contested fictions they are. But we need practice living toward this other kind of world.

So, for us, perhaps our better country can start here in this community – as we pray and eat and serve and give together across generations, across

cultures, across racial and economic, and yes, even party lines. Maybe here in worship is one place where we can glimpse what God most wants for us – a table where everyone is welcome, everyone is fed, and everyone belongs. Experiences like this can fuel us to stay dressed for action when fear starts to seize us again, when we're tempted to draw the circle tighter and only include those who think or speak or pray like us. Here we are fed with truth and goodness and beauty so that we have the strength to live out there in the world and be generous with others like God is with us.

We might wonder how the kingdom of God can be our true home, especially when self-appointed gatekeepers have tried so hard to keep some of us out. True, it's not exactly where we were born or where we live now, but it is ultimately where we come from – and it is where we're going. If, as Aquinas taught, all that belongs to God comes from God and will one day return to God, then the kingdom of God is our home in the truest sense of the word. Remember, home can be a relationship or a community as much as a place. It's wherever justice and peace are at home.

It's where our deepest treasures are – the love and the joy that sustain our best memories already live there. And it's not behind us – dependent on the fragility of our memory or the force of our will. It's not something we have to conquer to win or build a wall to defend. The kingdom of God is already ours to live into – here among us now and out there beyond the horizon waiting for us all in its fullness. It is a world worth waking up for. It's more than we've ever had to leave behind and more than we'll ever have to lose. Hear the good news: God's promises have changed the direction of our lives too. No more getting stuck in a past we cannot return to; no more paralysis with fear for the present; our future and our home lie onward. Amen.



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