



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

January 28, 2018

"Purple Space" - Hope Restored Sermon Series

The Rev. Steve Peich

Mark 1:14-20 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God,

¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

¹⁶ As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen.

¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹

⁹ As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets.

²⁰ Immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed Him.

How many of you folks like baseball? Baseball often has so many screwy moments to it. Here is one of those plays where the players are not on the same page. There is a man on first base whom the pitcher wants to get out by picking him off. The first baseman however is *focused on* the batter.

Watch what happens when they are not on the same page. (Video shows the first baseman backing off that base and the

pitcher throwing there anyway. The ball is thrown into foul territory and the runner advances).

Notice how the first baseman is doing *his* thing and the pitcher is doing *his*. When the plan of the first baseman and the pitcher's don't overlap, it creates one big mess.

I know this sounds odd, but this is a little like the problem in Israel during the first century. God's plan, so to speak, was in one direction but the plan of the people; the priests, the politicians and the Pharisees were in another direction. And because God's plan and their plans didn't overlap it created one big mess.

Today we continue our sermon series on "Hope Restored." In particular, I'm going to talk about how Hope is restored through what I call, "Purple Spaces."

In our verses today we come to what many theologians say is the center and the circumference of what Jesus taught and demonstrated in order to restore hope. That is, His declaration of the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

I'm not sure what you folks may think of when you hear the phrase The Kingdom of God or the

Kingdom of Heaven (which is really the same thing).

Maybe you picture some sort of medieval castle with some sort of throne room. Maybe you picture the pearly gates of heaven or some kind of other worldly place, a bit wispy and ethereal, almost cloud like.

When I did a Google image search with the phrase "kingdom of God" these dreamy-like pictures showed up. I'm not sure if this is the Kingdom of God or the Land of Oz. I'm a little surprised we don't see a unicorn.

My point is, if we image *this stuff* when it comes to the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven I can tell you that God's plan and our plan are not overlapping. And as a result we can end up really missing a great deal of what Jesus came to teach and demonstrate and accomplish—especially through His church.

Now I have to admit in trying to precisely describe the Kingdom of God we inevitably exhaust our vocabulary. It's meaning is larger than the words that can ever fully explain it or define it.

So what I'm giving you is a *working description* to at least give us some footing to *begin* to understand it.

When Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God He most often portrays it as something dynamic, not as a static place, but something that is moving and breaking into our world. In other words, the Kingdom of God is about the in-breaking of God's rule *on the earth* as it is going on in heaven.

That is, the rule of God is about bringing the purposes, plans, values, and character of God to *bear* on the world in real and tangible ways as it is in heaven. His purposes, values and character *to bear* on the way we do business, education and economics; the way we do family life, friendships, dating, sex, and marriage. Bringing His purposes and values on the way we do power, politics, and profit; and on the way we look at and live with the poor, the way we look at and live with the sick, the marginal, the hurting, the enslaved, the immigrant, the refugee and so much more.

In a nutshell, it is about God setting the world to rights through Jesus Christ; including and starting with, setting *us* (personally) to rights through Jesus Christ.

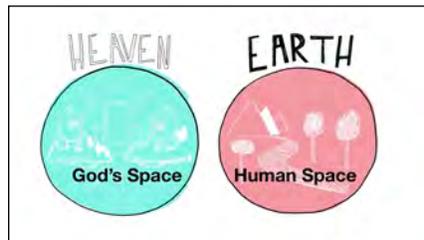
Let's break down Jesus monumental proclamation we just read.

First of all, in verse 15 we see it says, "*The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near.*" The word "fulfilled" means to finish or complete something. In other words, it is to bring something to a climax or culminating point.

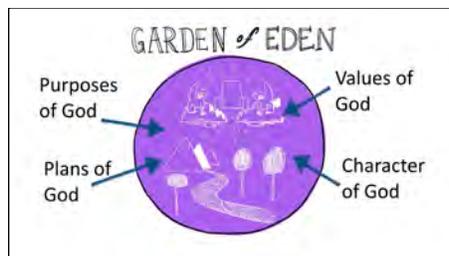
So why is that a big deal and necessary to highlight? Let me try to draw a very big picture about the

larger arc of scripture and what God is up to in the world.

From the beginning, the Bible has framed God's created reality as primarily two domains, or two spaces if you will. As in this cartoon depiction those domains are Heaven and Earth. For the sake of ease I'll call them "God Space" and "Human Space."



In chapter one of Genesis we see these two spaces completely overlapping. In this existence the purposes, plans, values, and character of God fully overlap and permeate Human Space creating what I call, "Purple Space."



But because of sin and the decision to rebel against God and His way, that is, the human action of and determination to live according to *their own* purposes, plans, values, and character— Human space becomes Separate space (as you see here as "Brown Space").



Now all of this is more than a little heartbreaking for God. In part because He knows this just leads to incredible and needless suffering and the possibility of spending eternity without Him. So out of His unfailing love for us He continues to provide space for overlap despite Humanity's rebellion.

This overlap was experienced to some extent through the rituals and sacrifices of the people of Israel, as well as through the actions of the priests and most especially through the temple. The Temple was a unique physical space where people could experience God in a unique way.

So these were some of the most common means by which the purposes, plans, values, and character of God's space could be experienced and overlap, at least to some small degree, *among* Human space.

So it is in this story of "spaces" that Jesus comes into play proclaiming the Kingdom of God and saying the words we just read, "the time is fulfilled."

What's exactly fulfilled? What is brought to a culminating point? All of what that Old Testament stuff of priests and sacrifices and temples pointed to and signified. In other words, Jesus is now The New Temple, The Final Priest, and The Final Sacrifice.

Let me show you a video that does a great job of explaining this grand narrative and of explaining how Jesus and "His kingdom come" changes everything.

As you watch it and feel some light bulbs go off in your brain try to look especially for what this metaphor implies *for us* Christians today.

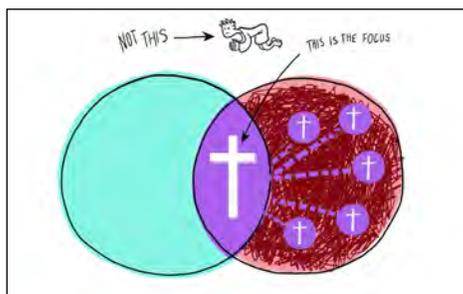
What does it imply for your particular role in the story of spaces? View at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zy2AQIK6C5k>

There are so many things I enjoy from this video but we have time only for a few.

Did you notice how they point out that from the beginnings of the Old Testament to the end of the book of Revelation (which is the last book of the bible) the *expectation* is that which is of God's space will come *down into* Human Space. Not that God will come down and torch Human Space, but RE-create it.

Or to put it another way, the Christian hope is *not simply* about how to get as many people as possible to leave the human space and get to heaven. That's super important, but that is not the whole story.

The story in greater part is about infusing Human space with God's space to make Purple space here in *this* place. In other words, bringing the purposes, plans, values, and character of Jesus Christ to bear on the world in every facet of life and in every person here and not just when we get to heaven. Have you ever thought of it that way?



We see this expressed throughout scripture. Let me just give you two places.

Think of how Jesus in the middle of His epic sermon on the character and nature of the kingdom, the sermon we call the Sermon On The Mount, Jesus tells us to pray: "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven."

Does He mean this or is this His way of getting us to whistle in the dark until He comes back? If He doesn't mean to do this then that's a pretty misleading idea He's communicating.

Furthermore, remember some verses I have shared recently with you. They are the messianic mission verses from Isaiah 61, which Jesus used to talk about His ministry.

It says: Isaiah 61:1-3 *"The spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me; to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; ² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; ³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of His glory."*

Now will they display His glory only when they get to heaven or is this implying this will happen on earth *as well as* in heaven? Does that sound like the Christian story is just getting as many people as you can into a life raft to hang on until Jesus comes back? Or does it sound more like the Messiah is about the business of *re-creating* life on this earth? In other words, Jesus is going about

the business of increasing Purple space *on earth* as it is in heaven. And this is where you come in. The main means by which and through which He does that are His disciples—you and me.

That's why, in part, we saw (in v. 16-20) the Kingdom proclamation is immediately connected to the calling of Disciples. Discipleship is in part joining God in the work of Divine overlap.

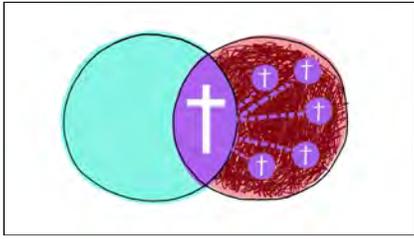
Theologian NT Wright brings all this together for us: "The key thing to note here is that the in-breaking kingdom Jesus was announcing *created* a new world, a new context, *and* (He) was challenging His hearers to become the new people that the new context demanded, citizens of a new world." Not later, but the one He started then, and continues to build now. I know it is not fully come or consummated, but it has come in part.

And *that* is what becoming a Christian is all about: that through Jesus Christ we become a New People and as a New People what do we mainly do? We join Him in the work of forging a New World.

Listen to one Christian as he comments on this issue: "A kingdom of God theology is *not* content with mission being a church-based work. Rather, it applies to the whole life of every believer. Every disciple is to be an agent of the kingdom of God, and every disciple is to carry the mission of God into *every sphere* of life." (Alan Hirsch)

Let me make it clear, Purple spaces are not simply "safe" places, detached from that bad ugly Brown space. They are "Engaged" spaces (remember the purple spots slide).

They are a distinct space but thoroughly engaged with the Brown space.



The Apostle Paul put it this way: Phil. 2.14-16: ¹⁴ Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault *in the midst of* a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine as lights in the world ¹⁶ as you hold on to the word of life.

Notice that we are to live blameless, pure lives as God's children not *far away from* but in the midst of a crooked and depraved generation. Not just at church or in your small group, but we are to shine as lights *in* the world.

Now if you are going to shine as lights in the world and make Purple spaces in the Brown spaces you need a few things going on. There are a million things I could say here let me just name a few.

One: start with *you*. Make sure *you* are being discipled or are discipling others.

For those not familiar with a Discippler, it is like a Spiritual Mentor for your faith. Find a mature mentor with whom you can journey for a while. Or meet up with a good soul friend with whom you can go deep into your faith. Learn from each other about what it means to live as New People who join God in creating a New World.

And what I mean by that is don't just find a mentor and soul

friend and just talk about it over coffee at McDonalds, but go out there and make Purple happen together.

If you cannot find a mentor, join various groups of learning at First Prez. For example, we have Life Training classes; Rooted Groups starting up very soon; or other small gatherings like Samson Society for men on Thursday or Family Fusion gatherings on Fridays for you folks with young families. You get the idea.

Part of my point is, we are inherently inadequate by ourselves to live life as Jesus intended. We need others in our journey to be more like Christ. I can only live fully into the life Jesus intended in and *through* others. So, that's the first thing.

Second, if you want to make purple spaces in the brown spaces reframe your worldview with some *hopeful imagination*.

You know why I like that video? Because it is so hopeful and optimistic. For some reason I often hear Christians in one way or the other saying, "The world is just too messed up to see God's kingdom come, His will done on earth as it is in Heaven."

Look, I get it. It is very easy to see all the Brown in the world and become pessimistic and even cynical, but let me tell you a story.

It was once reported in a magazine that there was a group of experts who were invited to discuss the future of the city of New York in 1860. They all speculated about what would happen to the city of New York in 100 years. And the conclusion was unanimous: The city of New York *would not exist* in 100 years.

Why? Because they looked at a couple of real issues that seemed insurmountable: The Masses and The Manure.

They said that if the population keeps growing at its present rate it would require six million horses to move the people around and do all the transportation, work, etc. They said the manure created by six million horses would be impossible to deal with. It would be an absolute health hazard, an ecological Armageddon. They were already drowning in manure at that time.

So what's my point with all this poop? These guys lacked both technological imagination and hope. When they looked around they saw nothing but dirty technology, which would choke the life out of people. But what happened in 40 years' time?

By the year 1900 in the U.S. there were 1,001 car manufacturing companies—1,001! They had all kinds of tiny factories building cars being built by guys like Henry Ford.

The idea of finding a different technology and the move away from horses was nowhere on their radar screen in 1860. So their outlook was gloom and doom.

So why do I tell this story? If you don't mind me saying, I often hear folks with a similar attitude in the church about the future our world—those Purple outcomes are pipe dreams!!

Look at crazy people like Isis or Al Qaeda or Russia. Or look at how the Left is doing this or the Right is doing that, and then there's Trump, Schumer, Republicans and Democrats, etc.

When our focal points are on those things and not on Him, we will feel that little change is possible, even with God! Purple will be a pipe dream!

But let me remind us of something. In 1944 the idea that Japan and Germany would be two of our closest allies seemed like an absolute pipe dream, an impossibility. But what has happened since then? (Picture: Chancellor Merkel; PM Abe; and President Obama). This seemed absolutely impossible just decades ago.

So what is your view of the future with our contemporary world? What is your view of the future of poverty, disease, human trafficking, atheism, or how we will live in the future with our present enemies?

Is it filled with Gloom and Doom? Or Kingdom Hope?

Folks, we serve a re-creating God who doesn't ignore the mess, but *has always moved* toward the mess of humanity. He *lived among* the mess. He *gave wisdom* to the mess. He *helped heal* a lot of the mess. He even *took on the abuse* from the mess. *But* He remains eternally committed to those in the mess and He has given us that noble responsibility of joining Him in that work of setting the world to rights.

So my question is this: What if you saw a great part of your purpose, as a Christian is to infuse the world with more Purple space?

Or you saw that part of your job description, as a lawyer is to infuse *that* human space and profession with Purple space?

Or what if you saw your role as a teacher to infuse *that particular* human space and profession with Purple space, with God space? If you saw your role and life as a carpenter, writer, computer programmer, student, neighbor, friend, etc., to make Purple space?

For example, when I worked in a mailroom for a big corporation while in seminary I did my job well in that Human space, but I also looked at how "Purple spaces" could show up *in that* space.

Very often it came via simply listening to people's heartaches and pains and offering these folks a Divine space in which they could experience the love and encouragement and wisdom they needed for life.

It got to be that there were so many folks who wanted to do this with me that I had to ask my boss to use a small conference room to counsel people during lunch.

Yes, mail and office supplies had to be delivered in an upmost professional fashion in the Human space. But as I was in the Human space of mail and office supplies I'm *simultaneously* in that Divine role of creating Purple space.

When you do even the smallest things to the glory of God you create Divine space in the Human space. When you choose to forgive when you have every reason to remain angry. Or when you choose to be humble instead of defensive when someone points out something in your life that may be off, hurtful, or just plain sinful.

Or when you take a big risk to ask to pray for someone, or take the big step of praying a prophetic

word, or pray for healing, etc., you create more Purple space.

I told you a couple of weeks ago that Repentance is central to the messages of John the Baptist and Jesus (as we saw in Mark 1.15). And I told you it meant to rethink, realign, and rebuild *everything* on the basis of Jesus.

I want to challenge you this week to rethink, realign, and rebuild *your outlook* about that *Brown Space* on the basis of Jesus and to rethink *your place* to create *Purple Space* in it.

Because when we do, we will see God's plan overlap our plan and we will see God's kingdom come His will done on earth—through us— as it is heaven. And *that* is how Hope is Restored in this world.

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Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at fpchawaii.org The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by visiting: fpchkoolau@gmail.com