

11/17/2019

**“Shaped by the Reign”**

**Scripture:** Isaiah 12; 64:8; 65:17-25; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

**Series: Abiding in the Reign**

**Consecration Sunday**

**Theme: As the people of God, we have been called and equipped for a variety of careers and ministries in which to partner with God in advancing God’s reign here on earth.**

We continue our sermon series this month on Abiding in the Reign, that is living and staying in the kingdom or reign of God, in and over our lives.

As you may remember, that reign begins with a decision, or choice that we make, to accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

And as we learned last week, we abide or remain in God’s Kingdom or reign by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now this week we consider how we and the world around us are “shaped” by God.

Do you ever wonder if God has some purpose for you? I’m sure many of you have. And some or many of you have discovered that purpose as well. Or perhaps you may at times wonder if that purpose is changing in some way. It may come from a new relationship, a change in your job, a change in health, or some other condition.

And sometimes, though we may have made the decision to follow Christ and be part of his kingdom, we may be uncertain of God’s presence and leading in our life.

We may not feel the Spirit really working on, within or through us.

Yet, no matter how things are going for us or no matter how far we may have strayed from God’s kingdom, the good news is that God is not done with us. We can remember, as the prophet Isaiah acknowledged before God, *“Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.”* (Isaiah 64:8 NIV)

The good news is that our God is the Creator of all. And God has not stopped creating. He can take what seems like the very worst and make it the very best. And God can create completely new and wonderful realities for the world and for each of us.

The LORD proclaimed through the Prophet Isaiah to his people who returned from exile, yet were far from being who God intends them to be (Isaiah 65:17-25). He says. . .

*“For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.*

*They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.*

*They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD-- and their descendants as well.*

*Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.*

*The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent--its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.”*

What a wonderful vision and promise indeed! A vision that was echoed in the Book of Revelation.

As Rev. Derek Weber, the Director of Discipleship Miniseries of the UMC says . . .

“God’s vision for this new reality is surprisingly current. He talks about infant mortality rates and references elder care, home ownership, and fair wages in these verses. Some of the most crucial issues facing people who work for justice in our nation come to light in this vision of God’s reign.”

And at the heart of it all is this sense of God’s presence throughout. God’s people call upon God, having already heard from God. And there shall be peace. Something that is still longed for today.

† **So where does that lead you and me?**

How do we fit into God's kingdom and reign? How are we shaped and formed into God's kingdom people? And how does God use us for that kingdom purpose as well?

If God can do all that and more for so many who had gone astray, think of what God can do for and with you!

Even some who became believers in Christ in the first century began to falter.

Paul's second letter to the Thessalonian believers calls upon them to not be idle or disruptive as they await the Lord's return. Each should contribute to their own well-being and to that of others. Now I seriously doubt that any among us are lazy or idle. Many have more to do for family and others than can even be done. You may feel exhausted or overwhelmed at times.

So sometimes it's a matter of being able to focus on what really matters most. I believe we need to learn and be able to please God first, and be realistic in trying to please others; including family, friends, church family, employers and others.

† The thing to remember is that **God, our Creator, knows not only what we need, but what we can do.** In fact, God has gifted us by the Holy Spirit to do those things which are most important to God. God has shaped us to help shape our world into God's kingdom.

Just as God, our Heavenly Father, sent and equipped Jesus to fulfill all righteous and bring his kingdom to earth, so we, as Christ's body now on earth, are called and equipped to do the same. Our mission, as United Methodists, is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

In his letter to the followers at Corinth (I Corinthians), The Apostle Paul uses the metaphor of the human body, with its many parts, each needing the others to accomplish what is needed and intended, to represent the church universal. And even each local church or community of faith in Christ works in a similar way. Although some gifts and tasks are more visible, all are important.

Let me share this witness from Julie Wicker of South Carolina (UR 11/4/19).

“Every November our women's group hosts a bake sale to raise money for local missions. Our bake sales unite different generations in our church to work as one body. This year I decided to bring cookies and brownies. As I prepared my items to bake, I remembered that I am the work of God's hands. Just as I mold my ingredients together,

God molds me for God's purpose. We are created in God's image and equipped for God's work. (See Ephesians. 4:12)

“When I don't feel equipped, I can rely on God's strength and not my own. We can serve in many ways, both big and small. Each one of us has a part, whether it's raising money by having a church bake sale, writing a devotional, or going into the mission field. As we grow in our walk with God, our faith progresses and God gives us a longing to serve in new ways.”

So today, we commit our intentions and ourselves in service to God's kingdom through our church. We do that by Consecrating our Gifts to God -- offering our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness for the coming year.

For some, or even most, it will be to continue the ways you have been doing so this year. And for others, hopefully many of us, it will be in some new, simple or special way that God has moved, shaped, and inspired you!

**For as the people of God, we have been called and equipped for a variety of careers and ministries in which to partner with God in advancing God's reign here on earth. In Jesus' name, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so let it be done!**