

### “JC Rules!”

Even though you sit this morning among all of these these people, you feel as though you sit alone. The sense is not a new one—you feel alone most of the time. You live in a neighborhood full of people on the go. You work in a building filled with conversation and activity. You might even sit around a dinner table with your family. But you feel like you face life entirely by yourself. You want to share your questions, your hurts, your ideas but feel there’s no one who knows you well enough to understand you.

Loneliness is something that troubles every generation, and it seems to only be getting worse. Some people consider it to be their number one fear. One recent study showed that for many, it ranked ahead of losing a job, and for some, even a cancer diagnosis. Another study reported that over half of us in this country have no one (outside of our immediate family) with whom we can discuss important matters. So I think it’s safe to say that a lot of us struggle with the consequences of this reality.

But we haven’t given up completely. We come to this big church on the hill, where the parking lot is full. We come and find our seat in this beautiful sanctuary. Even though we might feel all torn up inside, we put a smile on our face. And we wait to hear a word from the Lord— a word that will give us hope and convince us that even though we might feel like no one knows us or understands us, we’re fooling ourselves, because Christ is present for us.

And what do we hear him say? **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** What? “I’m lonely Lord!” “I can’t make sense of this life. I need your assurance and all I hear you say is I better clean up my act in order to get what you’re giving?” “Why does it feel like even you, Lord, don’t understand me?”

Oh my friends, but he does understand you. He does know you, your life, your secrets, your fears, your loneliness, your darkness. Of course he wants to help you clean up your act, because **on you** his light has dawned.

You see, in order to see the impact our gospel reading from Matthew has on all of our lives today, we first need to step back and try and understand how Jesus' words impacted the people who heard them first. Because we have to keep in mind that this is the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The only words that Matthew records him speaking up to this point are to John at his baptism. and then to Satan during his temptation in the wilderness. John had been arrested. Satan left defeated. Now, Jesus goes to the backwoods of Israel, and fires up his ministry with the words, **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**

What does this mean? Well the phrase “kingdom of heaven” doesn't mean some 'kingdom-place called heaven. It's another way of saying the Kingship of God. He got himself in remember? **“The word became flesh and dwelt among us.”** Now, the promise of what God would do to redeem and restore his created world, he was actually doing—in Christ. That's what was “at hand.” And repent? We hear this word and probably associate it with “stop doing those naughty things we all think and do in the dark.” That's part of it for sure. But the word Jesus actually used was so much bigger, and so much broader than that. What he was saying equated to a changing of the mind that is accompanied by a changed direction of life.

What we hear is “stop doing naughty things and we might go to heaven.” But if you were a first-century Jew out there in the Galilean countryside and you heard what Jesus said that way, I think you would have just yawned and kept working. They already believed God would look after them after death. And there is certainly nothing to suggest they were walking around all down in the dumps worrying about how their sins were going to be forgiven. They had the Temple and the sacrificial system for that. But what Jesus was really saying,

not only to the Jews, but to all those gentiles living out there on the fringe was that the “JC rules” are now in place because “The kingdom of God is here *in me*. Reorient your minds around this reality and your life will change.”

Of course, this didn’t set well with a lot of them. But as we will see in the next few chapters of Matthew, wherever Jesus went, people followed! But it seemed to be all the wrong people. Think about this. Jesus went into the back alleys and shady parts of town and ate and drank with the lonely and the outcast. He let people to get close to him, including prostitutes, men with leprosy, and even a tax collector who would become one of his closest companions. In other words, as King of the kingdom, Jesus was friend, teacher, healer, and ultimately Savior, to all of those in the dark. And this brings it back to you and me.

The JC rules are still in place, my friends. You better believe that he came, lived, died and rose again for us. But this isn’t just something that happened in the past and he forgot about us. He’s ruling each of our lives. And everyday he invites us to completely reorient our minds and lives around this new reality. Look, I know how lonely so many of us can feel. I know how God can seem silent and cold. I know how the darkness of sin and shame is all too often the place we choose to live. But Jesus says “Through my Spirit, turn from all that stuff. Turn from all those false views of the world and of me and embrace the reality that on you my light has dawned. The presence of the kingdom of God is in me. I’ve done all the hard work. I’ve got it all set. Now, I invite you into my mission where I will work through you.”

Now if you’re lonely, I know this sounds intimidating and maybe even ridiculous. Jesus really wants to work through you even though you feel like no one really knows you? Yes, he does.

But first things first. You and me, in this place, are the body of Christ. We come together to receive God’s gifts of grace through his word and sacraments. And while that’s the most important function of Christ’s church, we are also here to help minister to the needs of others. How do we do that? One way is through our Mission Fair. As

you've heard, after our service, you can see all the opportunities available to serve in our community and abroad. You can talk to leaders. You can ask questions. You can even put yourself out there and volunteer. And if you do, I want you to know something. The first thing is Jesus doesn't send us to do these things *for* him. They aren't "requirements" he holds over our heads. No, he invites us to do these things *with* him. Because where there is a need for restoration and redemption, whatever that looks like out there, Jesus is already active, shining his light into the darkness. If we can somehow help along the way, by being his hands and feet in the service to others, that's a wonderful thing.

The second thing is this. When you and take a chance, I guarantee what you will find are people who genuinely want to serve *with* you. Not only that, people who want to know you. People who will ask you questions. People who will be willing to listen to your answers. People who you might eventually call a friend. That's what happens when we truly embrace the presence of the kingdom of God in Christ.

Because wherever we find ourselves in this life serving with our Savior—whether it's outside these walls or inside these walls. Whether it's in our neighborhoods, at our jobs, in our schools—wherever it may be. When we serve others *with* Christ, the more we understand that a life under his rule as King is not one of individualism and solitude constantly being darkened by the shadows. But it's a life of community and companionship redefined by the light of his love.

However you feel today, know your are not alone. If you need help making a connection talk to me, Pastor Wayne, the Vicar, one of our DCE's— or the person beside you in the pew. Because Jesus Christ made all of this happen. He gives you a life secured by his death and resurrection. He gives you a place to serve in his kingdom. He makes us all a people belonging to him. And don't all of us yearn to belong? Jesus Christ says we do. But it's on his terms—the "JC rules." Because as King, that's just what he does. He rules our lives today and forever. **Amen.**