

Pentecost 2013

Acts 1-3

The Church and the Kingdom of God

Sermon

Ross, May 25th, 2013

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Scripture Reading:

ACTS 1:1-7

¹ In my first book^{*} I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach² until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit. ³ During the forty days after his crucifixion, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.

⁴ Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, “Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. ⁵ John baptized with^{*} water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

The Ascension of Jesus

⁶ So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?”

⁷ He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

* The reference is to the Gospel of Luke.

* Or *in*; also in 1:5b.

INTRODUCTION:

I. PENTECOST IS A WONDERFUL OCCASION TO CELEBRATE

A. TO CELEBRATE WHO WE ARE AS A RESULT OF THE AMAZING AND HISTORY MAKING EVENTS THAT TOOK PLACE IN JERUSALEM ALMOST 2000 YEARS AGO

S.P.S:

A. TODAY LET'S LOOK AT THE NATURE AND ROLE OF THE CHURCH

1. And ask how the Body of Christ relates to the Kingdom of God that Jesus' spoke so much about
2. To do that, we are going to spend time looking at the history of the Kingdom of God as well as what happened at Pentecost and see how they both relate
3. And what we can learn about the role of the church in that history

B. PRAYER

BODY:

A. LET'S START BY PAINTING A PICTURE OF THE FUTURE GOD PROMISES

1. The future we often entitle "the Kingdom"

Revelation 11:15

¹⁵ Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices shouting in heaven:

“The world has now become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ,*
and he will reign forever and ever

Revelation 22:16-21

¹⁶ “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this message for the churches. I am both the source of David and the heir to his throne.* I am the bright morning star.”

¹⁷ The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” Let anyone who hears this say, “Come.” Let anyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who desires drink freely from the water of life.

^{V20} He who is the faithful witness to all these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon!”

Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

²¹ May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s holy people.*

B. HERE WE HAVE A PICTURE OF THE FUTURE KINGDOM

1. When Jesus is the King of King and Lord of Lords
 - a) When all evil, all opposition, all that speaks and acts against God and his life and love will be defeated
 - b) And all that have suffered and been hurt will be saved and rescued—brought into the Kingdom of God to be safe forever
2. This is the complete reversal of the problems of the Garden of Eden, and the restoration of what God intended in the beginning with his creation of the universe and mankind

C. SO WHAT HAS PENTECOST GOT TO DO WITH THIS END TIME KINGDOM WE ALL LOOK FORWARD TO?

1. Let’s read what happened in Acts.
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* Or *his Messiah*.

* Greek *I am the root and offspring of David*.

* Other manuscripts read *be with all*; still others read *be with all of God’s holy people*. Some manuscripts add *Amen*.

II. ACTS 1-2:47: PENTECOST

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

¹ In my first book* I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit. ³ During the forty days after his crucifixion, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.

⁴ Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, “Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. ⁵ John baptized with* water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

1. We shouldn't miss the fact that in the midst of these events leading up to Pentecost—the clear topic that is being focused on recurringly—is the Kingdom of God

The Ascension of Jesus

⁶ So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?”

⁷ He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

2. Note Jesus answer to their question about the Kingdom is what was going to happen on Pentecost

⁹ After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. ¹⁰ As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. ¹¹ “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!”

B. ACTS 2:

* The reference is to the Gospel of Luke.

* Or *in*; also in 1:5b.

The Holy Spirit Comes

2 On the day of Pentecost* all the believers were meeting together in one place.

² Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. ³ Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. ⁴ And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages,* as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

⁵ At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. ⁶ When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.

⁷ They were completely amazed. “How can this be?” they exclaimed. “These people are all from Galilee, ⁸ and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages!

⁹ Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!” ¹² They stood there amazed and perplexed. “What can this mean?” they asked each other.

¹³ But others in the crowd ridiculed them, saying, “They’re just drunk, that’s all!”

C. THIS IS THE QUESTION WE ARE FOCUSING ON; WHAT DID THIS ALL MEAN?

1. Peter explains that it is what was prophesied about the last days

Peter Preaches to the Crowd

¹⁴ Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other apostles and shouted to the crowd, “Listen carefully, all of you, fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Make no mistake about this. ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as some of you are assuming. Nine o’clock in the morning is much too early for that. ¹⁶ No, what you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ ‘In the last days,’ God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit upon all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy.

* The Festival of Pentecost came 50 days after Passover (when Jesus was crucified).

* Or *in other tongues*.

Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸ In those days I will pour out my Spirit

even on my servants—men and women alike— and they will prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will cause wonders in the heavens above

and signs on the earth below— blood and fire and clouds of smoke.

²⁰ The sun will become dark, and the moon will turn blood red

before that great and glorious day of the LORD arrives.

²¹ But everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.’*

2. Peter is associating these prophecies of the last days with that Day, Pentecost

a) The time of the coming of the Spirit

b) A time of salvation

3. He continues to proclaim Jesus as the centre of it all who sits at God’s right hand in honour and with authority and power

²² “People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene* by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. ²³ But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him.

²⁴ But God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip.

V 32 “God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this. ³³ Now he is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven, at God’s right hand. And the Father, as he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today. ³⁴ For David himself never ascended into heaven, yet he said,

‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit in the place of honor at my right hand

³⁵ until I humble your enemies, making them a footstool under your feet.” ’*

* Joel 2:28-32.

* Or *Jesus of Nazareth*.

* Ps 110:1.

³⁶ “So let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!”

D. JESUS IS THE LORD AND MESSIAH, THE KING OF THE KINGDOM

³⁷ Peter’s words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?”

³⁸ Peter replied, “Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ This promise is to you, and to your children, and even to the Gentiles*—all who have been called by the Lord our God.” ⁴⁰ Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation!”

⁴¹ Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.

E. SO NOW WE HAVE THE BEGINNING OF A NEW COMMUNITY

1. The church, the body of Christ

- a) People who have been turned by the Spirit from the world, the old life separate from God
- b) People who have been born into a new relationship with God through Jesus and the Spirit

2. We see that they are living in the image of the Triune God, in community, exemplifying the life of the Kingdom that Israel failed to do

The Believers Form a Community

⁴² All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper*), and to prayer.

⁴³ A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. ⁴⁵ They sold their property and possessions and shared

* Or *and to people far in the future*; Greek reads *and to those far away*.

* Greek *the breaking of bread*; also in 2:46.

the money with those in need. ⁴⁶ They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity* — ⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

F. SO WE SEE HOW THE INITIAL DISCUSSIONS ABOUT THE KINGDOM IN ACTS 1

1. Leads to this amazing new stage in God's plan to extend his kingdom, his family, his relationship throughout the earth

G. ISRAEL WAS IN A SENSE A FAILED MODEL OF THE KINGDOM

1. It was a shadow of the real thing
2. It pointed to the Kingdom, but failed to truly be the Kingdom because the people continued to reject God and live faithless, selfish lives apart from God
3. But God promised them that he would restore his people and his kingdom through the Messiah
4. This what happened with the birth of the Church at Pentecost

H. ACTS GOES ON TO DESCRIBE THE FORMING AND THE LIFE OF THE EARLY CHURCH

1. How they worshipped, fellowshiped and shared the new life together
 - a) Loving God and one another, and sharing and spreading the good news of the Kingdom as time went by

I. TO SEE HOW PENTECOST FITS INTO THE HISTORY OF THE KINGDOM

1. Let us take a quick overview of the prophecies and teaching about the Kingdom before Pentecost
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* Or *and sincere hearts*.

III. PROPHECIES OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

A. DANIEL 7; DANIEL'S VISION

⁹ I watched as thrones were put in place
and the Ancient One* sat down to judge.

His clothing was as white as snow,
his hair like purest wool.

He sat on a fiery throne
with wheels of blazing fire,

¹⁰ and a river of fire was pouring out,
flowing from his presence.

Millions of angels ministered to him;
many millions stood to attend him.

Then the court began its session,
and the books were opened.

¹¹ I continued to watch because I could hear the little horn's boastful speech. I kept watching until the fourth beast was killed and its body was destroyed by fire. ¹² The other three beasts had their authority taken from them, but they were allowed to live a while longer.*

¹³ As my vision continued that night, I saw someone like a son of man* coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence.

¹⁴ He was given authority, honor, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed.

The Vision Is Explained

¹⁵ I, Daniel, was troubled by all I had seen, and my visions terrified me. ¹⁶ So I approached one of those standing beside the throne and asked him what it all meant. He explained it to me like this: ¹⁷ "These four huge beasts represent four kingdoms

* Aramaic *an Ancient of Days*; also in 7:13, 22.

* Aramaic *for a season and a time*.

* Or *like a Son of Man*.

that will arise from the earth. ¹⁸ But in the end, the holy people of the Most High will be given the kingdom, and they will rule forever and ever.”

B. SO IN THE TIME OF ISRAEL’S DEMISE AND CAPTIVITY, HERE IN DANIEL AND IN MANY OF THE PROPHETS

1. We read how the kingdom will be established permanently through the coming Messiah
2. Too often we then leap straight to Revelation and the second coming of Christ, jumping right over the Gospels and Acts and the history of the Christian church
3. The assumption too often is that these prophecies, and the ushering in of the Kingdom of God doesn’t take place until the second coming

C. SO LET’S LOOK AT SOME PASSAGES IN THE GOSPELS

Matthew 3:1-3

In those days John the Baptist came to the Judean wilderness and began preaching. His message was, ² “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.” ³ The prophet Isaiah was speaking about John when he said, “He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the LORD’s coming! Clear the road for him!’ ”*

Matt 4:17

From then on Jesus began to preach, “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.”

Matt 4:23

Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness.

* Or *has come*, or *is coming soon*.

* Isa 40:3 (Greek version).

Matt 5:3

“God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

Matt 9:35

Jesus traveled through all the towns and villages of that area, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness.

Matt 11:12

And from the time John the Baptist began preaching until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people are attacking it.

D. THESE AND MANY OTHER PASSAGES MAKE CLEAR THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD WAS COMING, THAT IN FACT IT WAS PRESENT IN JESUS, GOD INCARNATE, GOD WITH US

1. Jesus taught about the nature of the Kingdom through a large number of parables

E. THE PARABLES OF THE MUSTARD SEED AND YEAST ARE VERY INFORMATIVE

Matthew 13:31-34

Parable of the Mustard Seed

³¹ Here is another illustration Jesus used: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. ³² It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants; it grows into a tree, and birds come and make nests in its branches.”

Parable of the Yeast

³³ Jesus also used this illustration: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough.”

³⁴ Jesus always used stories and illustrations like these when speaking to the crowds. In fact, he never spoke to them without using such parables.

F. WHAT DO THEY TELL US ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM?

1. That it starts small, and spreads

- a) That doesn't fit with a picture of the Kingdom of God starting suddenly and dramatically at Christ's return

G. WHAT IT DOES PICTURE,

1. Along with the other prophecies, teachings and parables about the kingdom;

2. Is that the kingdom starts small, and grows gradually

3. This is what we see in Acts, starting at Pentecost

4. Acts is a history of the birth of the new stage of the Kingdom of earth, in the church

- a) And its gradual growth out from Jerusalem, and spreading slowly and surely out into the surrounding world

H. JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT THE CHURCH BEING THE KINGDOM, HIS KINGDOM, HIS BODY ON EARTH

1. And its role

Matt 16:19

And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven."

Matt 16:28

And I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom."

Matthew 25:14-21

¹⁴ "Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. ¹⁵ He gave five bags of silver* to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities. He then left on his trip.

* Greek *talents*; also throughout the story. A talent is equal to 75 pounds or 34 kilograms.

¹⁶ “The servant who received the five bags of silver began to invest the money and earned five more. ¹⁷ The servant with two bags of silver also went to work and earned two more. ¹⁸ But the servant who received the one bag of silver dug a hole in the ground and hid the master’s money.

¹⁹ “After a long time their master returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they had used his money. ²⁰ The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of silver came forward with five more and said, ‘Master, you gave me five bags of silver to invest, and I have earned five more.’

²¹ “The master was full of praise. ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s celebrate together!’^{*}

I. JESUS’ TEACHINGS, ACTIONS AND PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM ILLUSTRATE BOTH PRESENT AND FUTURE ASPECTS OF THE KINGDOM

1. He talks of its nature and character
2. The urgent need for it
3. God’s quest to rescue his people out of the world and claim them as his treasures and make them part of his kingdom
4. The life of light and truth that members of the Kingdom will emanate and demonstrate
5. The future and ultimate manifestation of the kingdom when it will finally envelop all of the earth

J. CLEARLY HE INCLUDED THE FACT THAT THE KINGDOM IS NOT JUST IN THE FUTURE

1. But in him and through the Holy Spirit the Kingdom is alive and functioning on earth in the here and now among his called out people



^{*} Greek *Enter into the joy of your master* [or *your Lord*]; also in 25:23.

IV. WHAT HAPPENED AFTER PENTECOST?

Acts 8:12

But now the people believed Philip's message of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were baptized.

Acts 19:8

Then Paul went to the synagogue and preached boldly for the next three months, arguing persuasively about the Kingdom of God.

A. PAUL TAUGHT THAT WE ARE TO BE LIVING THE LIFE OF THE KINGDOM HERE AND NOW

Rom 14:17

For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

1 Cor 4:20

For the Kingdom of God is not just a lot of talk; it is living by God's power.

Col 1:13

For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son,

Rev 1:6

He has made us a Kingdom of priests for God his Father. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen.

V. SUMMATION:

A. SO WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM ALL OF THIS?

1. That the Kingdom of God is not just a future phenomenon

B. EVER SINCE THE BEGINNING

1. When man walked away from God
2. God has been working to restore his kingdom

C. WHAT IS THAT KINGDOM?

1. A simple definition is “God’s rule”
2. We might better describe the kingdom as anywhere that God is present and active
 - a) Wherever people are sharing in Jesus’ relationship with the Father through the communion of the Spirit

D. ISRAEL WAS TO BE A MODEL OF THAT

1. Of the kingdom, of a trusting relationship with God
2. Being God’s partners in demonstrating and witnessing to the world, what life with God is like

E. WHY DID THEY FAIL?

1. Because they persisted in living apart from God
 - a) They refused to be the Kingdom of God
2. They even rejected the King of the Kingdom when he came
 - a) Because they didn’t recognise him, and that was because they didn’t really know or trust or have any real fellowship with God

F. SO JESUS CAME TO SHOW THEM THE FATHER

1. He came to teach about the *koinonia*—the community of God
2. To demonstrate the life of that community or kingdom
 - a) The life of the Father, Son and Spirit
3. Jesus gathered a number of followers to participate in his life, the life of the Father through the Spirit
 - a) The life and work of the Kingdom of God

G. HE DIED TO DEFEAT ALL THE KINGDOMS OF THE WORLD

1. All the rebellion, the sin, the separation between God and man, and the results of that selfish, worldly, ungodly life

H. PENTECOST IS THE BEGINNING OF GOD'S BUILDING THE LASTING KINGDOM ON EARTH

1. Many of the prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled at Pentecost
 - a) It can be hard to accept that the dramatic prophecies of Daniel and other prophets could be fulfilled by what happened on that day
2. But they were
 - a) They were the beginning of the Kingdom, that will eventually fulfil all those prophecies in full
3. The people's repentance, their turning from the kingdom of the world, their own independent, godless lives was the start, their entrance into the life and kingdom of God
4. Their receiving the Holy Spirit was their becoming part of that Kingdom
 - a) Trusting in God, letting Jesus save and lead them
 - b) Having the Spirit, God's presence in their lives, bringing them into Jesus' relationship with the Father
 - c) Leading them to be members of the kingdom actively spreading the light, the love, the transforming and healing power of God

CONCLUSION:

A. SO THE CHURCH THAT BEGAN AT PENTECOST IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1. The beginning of the kingdom that will never end
2. Today we belong to that Kingdom

3. Jesus is reigning at the Father's right hand, and has sent the Spirit to enlighten and empower us to live and share the kingdom, the life of God

4. And so we are his partners in continuing on the mustard seed and leaven-like expansion of that

a) As Joseph Tkach wrote last week;

My "business," and yours, is representing the kingdom of God. Suppose God asked you to walk around for a few hours each week wearing a big sign saying something like "Be kind, be loving, be graceful, be forgiving, be generous, seek truth, be a Christian." You'd be pretty careful how you behaved while doing that, wouldn't you? Thankfully, God does not expect us to literally do this. However, he does expect us, through our behavior, to show there is an alternative to the vanity, selfishness, lust and greed that is the way of life in this world.

On the Day of Pentecost this year, let's count on the Holy Spirit to be at work among us ...showing by the way we live the hope that we have in Jesus (1 Peter 3:15).

B. WE HAVE THE PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF BEING PARTNERS IN SPREADING THE LIFE OF GOD INTO THE WORLD EVER WIDER AND DEEPER

1. Infiltrating the world

2. Overcoming evil with good, bit by bit

3. Shining the light of God into the darkness

4. As the song goes, we are marching ever further and deeper into the love of God

C. PRAYER

Lord's Supper

VI. WE JOIN TOGETHER AS MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

A. TO REPRESENT THROUGH THE ACTIONS OF TAKING THE LORD'S SUPPER,

1. Our fellowship with the Father, Son and Spirit
 - a) And with one another,
 - b) And with all members of the Church down through the ages
2. The bread and wine symbolise that as the Church, that began at Pentecost in Jerusalem almost 2000 years ago
 - a) We are the Kingdom of God
 - b) The kingdom that is the growing family of God
 - c) The kingdom that will extend through Jesus Christ to encompass all people and all the world
3. The bread and wine symbolise that our life does not exist in isolation
 - a) That our present and future purpose is to share in the life Jesus has with the Father through the Holy Spirit
4. And as we take it we both look back to what Jesus accomplished for us in his life, death, resurrection and ascension
 - a) And we look for his continual presence and help in our lives as his people, his light and love in the world today
 - b) And we look forward to the full culmination of that light and love in the fullness of the Kingdom in the future

B. BREAD:

- 1.

C. WINE: