

Fitting into the Kingdom

By Pastor Larry Booth

Congregational Church, Grant

How shall we understand the death and resurrection of Christ?

Jesus began and spent the early years of his ministry in Galilee, the land of his home and raising. We don't know how early he began, and what it consisted of, but by the time he traveled south along the Jordan River valley to where John the Baptist was preaching and baptizing, John knew of him, as did the priests and Pharisees of the area.

Other than the birth stories of both Jesus and John, we don't know much about either of them until as adults their ministries make them known.

John was raised in the wilderness area east of the Jordan. He became famous for drawing great crowds to the river to hear his preaching, and to be baptized as his followers. He was known for prophet-style preaching, and for his no-truths-barred style of confronting people of their sins.

Jesus had a different style of teaching. The Gospels describe him as sitting among the people, on the hills and in the by-ways, going out to them rather than "calling them to him" at a certain place—like 'the river'. But the two of them had a very certain message in common, which was to learn of the Kingdom of God to come, and to prepare for it.

John spoke of "repenting" and being baptized in it. Jesus spoke of "believing and receiving" it. Both of them taught that when the believing was fully received in a person, that person would change. And the change would make all the difference in the world, and beyond!

John taught a simple gospel: "Whoever has two coats must share with him who has none."

And he said, "So it is with food. And tax collectors must deal honestly with everyone, and soldiers give-up extorting money by false accusations and threats."

It was a gospel of justice, social and legal. And Jesus was baptized into it, in the river, by John. Jesus taught, and indeed is, the source of all salvation, which is to believe in God, our Father, and God's Kingdom that is among us. And when Jesus taught of The Kingdom, he, like John, was preaching against Rome, and against the Chief Priest and rulers of the Temple, and of the wickedness and idolatry of both. John and Jesus were both killed for that—one beheaded and one crucified.

We all are left to ask where and how we fit into the Kingdom. Do we deal in the worship of idols—our own secret idols of power, wealth, allegiances and loves, to the abuse of others? And how shall we work out our place in the new Kingdom, if we indeed shall?

And how shall we deal with the One crucified?