

SERMON: "How Does God Rule?"

First United Church, Waterloo – Sunday, June 26, 2022

PRAYER: "There is always something more you have to say to us, O God. Bless us and inform us as we consider words some people chose to add on to your Word. May they also be a channel for your voice, and a conduit for your light." Amen

Sometime around 1850, the *New York Tribune's* Horace Greeley apparently joined in the encouragement to annex Oregon to America by saying, "Go West, young man." He never said that. What he did once say was, *"Turn your face to the Great West, and there build up a home and fortune."*

October 29, 1975, American President Gerald Ford vowed to veto any bail-out bill for the city of New York because he felt responsibility for the city's looming bankruptcy was *"being left on the front doorstep of the federal government—unwanted and abandoned by its real parents,"* The October 30 morning edition of the *New York Daily News* featured a headline crafted by some editor: "Ford to City: Drop Dead".

Emendations and additional comments by editors have been happening for ages.

There are thousands of them in the actual pages or footnotes of the Bible.

Among the most well-known of them are the words some versions add to our Lord's Prayer:

"For thine is the kin(g)dom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever." Amen.

The footnotes often begin with: *"Other authorities, some ancient, add"*

The Jerusalem Bible translation, which is primarily used by Roman Catholics, carries this footnote: *"a reading introduced through liturgical tradition."*

That gives us some clue as to why some editors were moved

to make an addition to the original text. They wanted the prayer to end with a doxology.

Their extra words have a kind of precedent in the Old Testament, I Chronicles 29:11-13:

"Thine, O God, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens is thine; thine is the kin(g)dom, O God, and thou art exalted and head above all."

Words attributed to the ruler David in a public ceremony where he handed over the task of building a temple for God to his young son, Solomon;

and handed over a huge donation of gold and silver to make it happen.

Anglican ears among us might have perked up because those words are often spoken in Anglican worship during the time of making offerings.

Great heaps of gold and silver however, don't often appear there nor in the worship services of other denominations.

Well, enough fluff for an introduction.

Let's just thank angels for whispering in some editors' ears.

I HOW SO?

Almost all Protestant congregations regularly add those words to our Lord's Prayer.

So, what are we saying when we offer up this closing ascription of praise?

If the kin(g)dom, the power, and the glory are God's forever, how does that take effect?

How does God exercise rule?

Well, for us, we begin with the One who came to initiate the rule of God on earth: Jesus.

Unlike John the Baptist, who preached a future day of reckoning form of kin(g)dom,

Jesus preached "the kin(g)dom of God is near, at hand".

This realm of God is now present, in motion, and it is evolving towards some time of fulfillment.

In realm of God governance and rule have a far different character and form

than the ways in which power is exercised in human governments.

That becomes particularly clear in John's version of Jesus' audience with Pontius Pilate.

Here is what we might view as a face-off between the procurator who represents an Empire that employs violence as a common practice and the emissary of God's non-violence.

In declaring that his kin(g)dom "*does not belong to this world*",

Jesus is not differentiating between some realm of heaven and the third planet from the sun.

It means the world as it has been accustomed to being governed and operated.

In the viewpoint of Bible scholar John Dominic Crossan, Jesus' testimony goes like this:

"Your soldiers hold me, Pilate, but my companions will not attack you even to save me from death. Your Roman Empire, Pilate, is based on the injustice of violence, but my divine kin(g)dom is based on the justice of non-violence." 1

The manner and style in which God's rule on earth is exercised is diametrically opposite to the way things usually are.

Jesus had already planted the seeds out of which this new realm would take shape and form.

His followers would be empowered to keep the momentum going forward against all odds.

King Herod could act to snuff out John the Baptist

who was like a one-person show with a monopoly on the future.

Pilate can do little to snuff out what Jesus put into motion,

he built up a company, he started a franchise operation.

And that, truly, is how God rules: it's a co-operative project, a collaborative effort.

We get a good sense of that a few decades after Jesus,

in a letter sent out by Paul or someone like Paul, to newly-formed congregations in Ephesus.

Those followers of Jesus, like the first disciples, are enlisted to be agents of God's governance.

The mission with which they are entrusted also comes couched within words of prayer.

They are among those who inherit Christ-like power for change:

"God put this power to work in Christ when God raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And God has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church." (Ephesians 1:20-22)

Using enthronement imagery, this author makes it clear that the resurrection of Jesus is an event, a divine mystery, that affects not only human beings but all of creation and all the systems, powers, principalities, and other pretenders to authority throughout history. Borrowing royal imagery from the book of Psalms, this author proclaims Jesus' resurrection has wide-ranging social-political impact and import.

It's similar to the cosmic significance attributed to the cross in Colossians 2:14-15.

Bible scholar Markus Barth, noted it as far back as 1974 in his commentary on this letter:

"Ephesians intends ... to present the gospel as a message of world-wide peace, rather than as news of the salvation of individual souls only...."

Ephesians emphasizes the political and cosmic relevance of the resurrection, by which a new and good order is established for the whole universe." 2

God's rule through Jesus the Christ is exercised by a companionship between the exalted One and those who choose to follow, who become part of a movement called "the church".

They too, the author declares in chapter 2 have been "raised up with Christ", which is much more than a mere rising to life after death, it is here and now a rising up to the challenge and mission of helping the realm of God get realized on earth, in this world.

Every generation of followers of Jesus gets to share in that effort in their own time and place.

Followers of Jesus could be described as plotters of resurrection.

Through the ages, they have been at work and have had impact: advocates for women's rights, and children's rights, and human rights.

We've witnessed it in the stamina and persistence of the mothers of Northern Ireland, the civil rights movement in America, and the activists who eliminated apartheid in S. Africa. We've heard the sound of it, felt the brush and call of it, tasted some fruits of it.

From her place of exile in the early 1980s, Guatemalan poet, Julia Esquivel proclaimed the spirit of it:

*"It isn't the noise in the streets that keeps us from resting, my friend,
nor is it the shouts of the young people coming out drunk from 'St. Paul's' bar,
nor is it the tumult of those who pass by excitedly on their way to the mountains.
There is something here within us which doesn't let us sleep, which doesn't let us rest,
which doesn't stop pounding deep inside,
it is the silent, warm weeping of Native women without their husbands,
it is the sad gaze of the children fixed there beyond memory in the very pupil of our eyes
which, during sleep, though closed, keep watch with each contraction of the heart,
in every awakening ..."*

What keeps us from sleeping is that they have threatened us with Resurrection!

Because we have felt their inert bodies and their souls penetrated ours doubly fortified.

*Because in this marathon of Hope, there are always others to relieve us
in bearing the courage necessary to arrive at the goal which lies beyond death.*

*They have threatened us with Resurrection!
because they are more alive than ever before, because they transform our agonies,
and fertilize our struggle, because they pick us up when we fall, and gird us like giants
before the fear of those demented guerillas.*

*They have threatened us with Resurrection!
because they do not know life (poor things!).*

*This is the whirlwind which does not let us sleep,
the reason why we sleep, we keep watch, and awake, and dream.
No, it's not the street noises, nor the shouts from the drunks in 'St. Paul's' bar,
nor the noise from the fans at the ball park.
It is the internal cyclone of a kaleidoscopic struggle
which will heal the wound of the quetzal fallen in Ixcán.
It is the earthquake soon to come that will shake the world and put everything in its place ...*

*Accompany us then on this vigil and you will know what it is to dream!
You will then now how marvellous it is to live threatened with Resurrection!*

*To dream awake, to keep watch asleep, to live while dying
and to already know oneself resurrected!"* 3

CONCLUSION

"For thine is the kin(g)dom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever."
Additional words, yes, but still power-packed words.
We not only say these words and pray these words, we get to seek to live into these words.
We seek to follow Jesus as the "head" of this body called "the church".
We are joined at the hip and at the lip for ministry and transformative outreach.
We are part of a vision, divine prospect,
to create and build a world where love over-rules all other powers.
We are called to actions of both resistance and redistribution
so that justice happens and non-violence is an ever-present reality.
That's how God has chosen to rule.
South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu put it this way:
"God without you won't. You, without God, can't"
Rise up, people of God! Let's keep on plotting resurrection.

Notes

1 quoted in “Jesus’ Kingdom Program” <http://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/christianity/2004/04/jesus-kingdom-program.aspx>, p. 3/10.

2 Markus Barth, Ephesians 1-3, (Anchor Bible commentaries), (Doubleday, New York, NY: 1974), page 170.

3 In Diann L. Neu, Women Church Celebrations, (Silver Spring, MD: 1985), page 52.