

Thy Kingdom, Thy Will  
Reading from the Old Testament: Psalm 62  
Reading from the Gospels: Matthew 6:10

It has been a busy couple of weeks in this old world. Nervous over China's rising power, Australia will become the 7th nation to operate nuclear submarines. Meanwhile, South Korea launched a test missile from a submarine while its neighbor to the north, North Korea, has again ignored UN resolutions in testing ballistic missiles launched from a train.

The International Criminal Court is investigating whether crimes against humanity have taken place under the administration of Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, and the UN has recorded 1,200 deaths and 1,100 rapes by militias in the Democratic Republic of Congo this year. Suga Yoshihide abruptly resigned as Japan's prime minister. Supporters of Brazil's President Bolsonaro are making noises that point toward an effort to retain power illegally. Guinea's president, Alpha Conde was ousted in a coup. Haiti's prime minister fired the chief public prosecutor who has accused the prime minister of involvement in the assassination of Haiti's president. There are disconcerting and potentially violent concerns over political power plays in Venezuela,

Honduras, Chad, Ethiopia, Thailand, Myanmar, and let's not forget the pep rally for insurrectionists in D.C. yesterday.

Powers and principalities in a world that went from wired to haywired with the tech fueled manipulation of our minds and twerking of our emotions via misinformation, demagoguery, and all things incendiary. The iconic film, *To Kill a Mockingbird* was on this week, and in one scene the irascible Scout sees her classmate Walter pouring maple syrup on his dinner vegetables, and she exclaims, "What in the Sam Hill are you doing?" Did you know that Sam Hill was supposedly a surveyor in Michigan who was so foul-mouthed that his name became a substitute for profanity in polite social settings? These days they'd just give Sam Hill a cable news show.

"What in the Sam Hill are you doing?" In observing everything from local school board meetings, to the weekly coup de tats across the globe, to the rise of authoritarian regimes, to the daily deluge of incendiary spew on our little digital rage machines, you have to wonder if the good Lord above isn't repeatedly shouting, *What in the Sam Hill are you doing?*

So much foment, so little reason as princes, paupers, poets, and would be potentates posture, prance, and pounce in pursuit of power. Kissinger said that "power is the ultimate aphrodisiac." The Salvadorian author, Horacio Castellanos Moya wrote that "power lacks morals or principles. It only has interests." And none other than Ralph Waldo Emerson prayed, "Don't trust children with edge tools. Don't trust man, great God, with more power than he has until he has learned to use that little better. What a hell we should make of the world if we could do what we would!"

The Smithsonian holds no collection of American royal jewels, and tierras here in the land of the free are mostly limited to beauty pageants and homecoming games, but our resume is chock full of kingmakers and kingdom questing. And yet, here we gather week after week and pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." To whom are we praying and for what are we hoping?

Early in Israel's history, Samuel, the prophet and judge, was approached by the elders of Israel with a complaint, "You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations." So, the Lord said to Samuel, "Listen to

the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them." So, the Lord instructed Samuel to warn the people of the consequences that would occur if their request for a king was granted. "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers."

Samuel urged the people to understand that the ways of a king, or for that matter any human structures of power, would never fully align with the ways of God and often oppose God's will for a peaceable kingdom. And yet, history has revealed humanity's perennial attempt to equate human kingdoms with God's kingdom. When the Israelites, new to a promised land, brought the ark of the covenant to Shiloh, they

thought that surely this will be the kingdom of God. Yet it was revealed to be far less than that. When David united Israel and brought the capital to Jerusalem, and when Solomon, so prosperous and wise, constructed the temple of the Lord, again and again the people thought, "Certainly, this is the kingdom of God." However, the improprieties, power struggles, and apostasies of succeeding kings led to the collapse of the nation, the destruction of Jerusalem, and exile, revealing their nation to be something far removed from the kingdom of God.

So, by the time Jesus appeared on the scene, there had evolved three general opinions about how the kingdom of God would finally be established. The Zealots believed the secret to the kingdom of God was revolution, an armed insurrection against Rome. After the trial of Jesus, Pontius Pilate offered the people a choice of who he should release: Barabbas, an avowed Zealot or Jesus. Knowing the mindset of the Zealot and the ways of Jesus, who did the people choose? Didn't they choose what we humans have always chosen, earthly power and possession over grace and generosity?

A second view of God's kingdom in the days of Jesus held that if everyone could just manage to keep the entire law as given to Moses,

the kingdom of God would be established. These were the fundamentalists who hassled Jesus throughout his ministry and conspired to have him arrested. Just let them run the show and they'd get everybody to behave. That didn't work out so well, either. For within a generation the temple would again be destroyed, and Israel would again collapse.

A third group held that God's kingdom would arrive via some apocalyptic event, but Jesus' mission of teaching, healing, and mercy; not to mention, his refusal to heed the boundaries and fences we erect between people, while all impressive, didn't look all that apocalyptic, nor was it reminiscent of the great King David. The chorus wasn't singing, "Happy days are here again," and the band playing "Hail to the chief" was not large enough to make that much noise even on Palm Sunday, at least not enough to maintain the mood until the weekend. Parade on Sunday. Execution on Friday. That's a pretty short run for a kingdom. Rome was still in power.

Of course, Jesus' understanding of his kingship was not exactly the gold standard for how to play politics or rule a nation. When his disciples started lobbying for offices in the new regime, Jesus said, "You

know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

We've seen experiments in democracy, Marxism, totalitarianism, socialism, monarchy, oligarchy, and theocracy, but what is this kingdom of God, and what are the expectations for its citizens therein, because this sounds like something very different? About to be condemned under the title King of the Jews, Jesus tells Pilate, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done. So, what is this kingdom about and what is this King's will for us. The Confession of 1967 says, "God's sovereign love is a mystery beyond the reach of the human mind. Human thought ascribes to God superlatives of power, wisdom, and goodness. But God reveals divine love in Jesus Christ by showing power

in the form of a servant, wisdom in the folly of the cross, and goodness in receiving sinful men and women. The power of God's love in Christ to transform the world discloses that the Redeemer is the Lord and Creator who made all things to serve the purpose of his love."

So, this King, enthroned on a cross and to whom we pledge our fealty, "made all things to serve the purpose of his love." Thy kingdom ... Thy will? This king's throne is a cross, and this king's will is that in all things we would serve the purposes of God's love, a love that disregards the artificial lines and flawed power structures that divide, conquer, foment conflict, abuse the earth, and manufacture injustice. Serving the purpose of love means that on both good and evil days, we will always seek the good for our neighbor, we will always pursue the path that leads to mercy, we will always seek the way of reconciliation and justice. Consequently, as citizens of God's kingdom we will always live in tension with the structures of this world, speaking the truth love demands.

William Sloane Coffin said it well, "There are three kinds of patriots, two bad, one good. The bad ones are the uncritical lovers and the loveless critics. Good patriots carry on a lover's quarrel with their



country, a reflection of God's lover's quarrel with all the world." (William

Sloane Coffin, *Credo*)

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.