

**Sermon     August 22, 2021     The Spirituality of the Cross XI: The Two Kingdoms**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Throughout this series it has been made clear that we have not been brought into a religion where everyone glows in the dark, all are healed from every disease of body and mind, and most are financially in the upper class. We have been brought into a religion where we bring nothing to the table and where God works through very ordinary water, bread, wine, people, and circumstances. This is the spirituality of the cross. This approach to the Christian faith is not popular, because it forces us to concede that not every day of our lives is going to be a mountain top, Red-sea-crossing type of day. It is going to be mostly wandering in the wilderness. Yet this is precisely how God orders our lives and makes himself known to us, just as he did with our ancestors in the faith. Today we take this idea and apply it to another very ordinary part of our lives. Let's take a look at how we who have been justified before God by faith are to view our lives in the church and in society in general. If we get this one wrong, which most people do, we will never be able to think and act clearly in politics and religion, and will always be confused about what God's will is for us and for the rest of the world. So let's get into it.

Jesus starts us off in our consideration of this topic with his famous word to Pontius Pilate. Pilate asked Jesus about the nature of his so-called kingship. What did Jesus say?

**Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world." John 18:36**

Well that's pretty clear. But what do we do with that? Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. Yet here we are smack dab in the middle of the world with all its commerce, governments, opinions, viruses, forest fires and war. Some people take this teaching of Jesus and retreat from the world. The Amish and Mennonite communities are good examples of this. As are monasteries and convents. Others go half-way and build a log cabin on a piece of land, grow their own food, homeschool the kids, and only go into town for fabric, baking powder, vinegar, tools, and auto parts. Others take these words of Jesus, live their lives as

believers, and ignore what is going on in the world. Or they pretend they have nothing to do with the rest of society. We might say they live in a sort of bubble. Yet others realize they cannot escape the fact we live in a world full of other people, many non-believers, and just go through the motions of being a citizen with no real interest in the goings on. Well, Jesus adds interest to this topic with his words recorded in Matthew;

**When you pray, say, “... Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Matthew 6:10**

How can Jesus tell Pontius Pilate his kingdom is not of this world and also instruct us to pray that God’s kingdom would come to this earth? Those two statements of Jesus seem contradictory. Let’s reconcile them. Here Jesus introduces us to what we might call the first of God’s two kingdoms. Yes, TWO kingdoms. When Jesus tells us to pray for his kingdom to come to earth he is talking about his church. Jesus church is the kingdom of God on earth. Martin Luther clarifies this prayer for God’s kingdom to come in his explanation to this petition of the Lords Prayer;

**How does God’s kingdom come?**

**When our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life here in time and there in eternity.**

God’s kingdom that comes to this earth is his church. His church comes from heaven in Jesus Christ. His church is spiritual in nature. It consists of his word, the sacraments, and all repentant believers.

People get confused with these words of Jesus, too. They feel this is his clarion call to transform society and prepare it for the coming of the Lord. They get into politics, run for office, support Christian based advocacy organizations and are happiest when other Christians occupy government positions. They are all about winning this country for Jesus. They do not understand that God’s kingdom on earth is his church. Are we called to transform the United States into God’s church? Are believers elsewhere called to transform their countries into the church? No. As nice as that may sound. Think of the problems of mixing government and the church. The church has had its own military and secret

service, with disastrous results. People who held somewhat different beliefs even within the church faced the Inquisition and torture and death. We see the horrors of other religions driving society as Islam rebels hold Christians at gunpoint and instruct them to renounce their faith or die. The Taliban will now enforce Islamic Sharia law in Afghanistan stripping residences of their fought-for freedoms. And it runs the other way as well. King Henry VIII of England had irreconcilable differences with the Pope, closed England's monastic orders, took their money and property, and established his own church – the Church of England. Jesus kingdom is not of this world? It was for King Henry VIII. Churches in Europe have also been an integral part of the government for centuries, receiving their funding from church taxes and their theology from state universities. The result? The majestic cathedrals in Europe are now empty and the citizens are completely secularized. We are in the church. We obviously also find ourselves as a part of a society – the “world.” How are these two very different areas of our lives supposed to fit together?

Jesus puts this puzzle of kingdoms together in his words found in John. Jesus is in the upper room with his disciples, praying his last prayer with them before his death. Jesus says;

**I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. John 17:14-18**

Is Jesus' kingdom of this world? No. Is the world separate from Jesus' kingdom? Yes. Are Jesus' disciples to separate themselves from the world? No. There we have the recipe of how to live as members of Christ's church and as citizens of the world. Simply put, we live in both God's kingdom of his church AND in the kingdom/ government of this world, but we keep their purposes and functions separate.

We cannot make the church synonymous with the culture. Yet this happens all the time. Have any of us ever been members of a Slovak Lutheran church? Black Baptist? Some were members of German Lutheran churches. There the culture

and religion became linked. We have Polish Catholics, Ethiopian Orthodox, and Burmese protestants. The church is not supposed to be of this world, and as much as it is in the world it is to be universal. When the church gets mixed with the culture, the culture will also shape the teachings of the church. We see this in our own country's churches as many have shifted their positions on marriage, abortion, human sexuality, evolution, the role of women, etc. to conform with secular positions. It spells disaster for the church when that happens.

God rules his kingdom of the church with his word and sacraments. We call this his right-hand kingdom. God offers grace, love, forgiveness, reconciliation, and the peace that passes all understanding. God rules the world with his power, morality, and reason. We call this the kingdom of his left hand. Here God intends that all people would be feed, clothed, and housed as he causes his rain to fall and the sun to shine on both the just and the unjust. Here he seeks the preservation of everyone's life, health, property, and reputation by means of a basic morality he communicates to us through our conscience. Science and reason help society to do well as we reflect and act on experimentation, observation, and our own experiences in life. The kingdom of God's left hand is also where we live most of our lives. It is also where we engage the world, loving our neighbor as ourselves as we faithful fulfill the work of our various vocations or callings in each of the four estates God places us.

None of this is as easy as it sounds, so hopefully next week we can consider how to apply this two-kingdom approach to our daily lives, and how it fits in to living in the spirituality of the cross. God bless you as you receive the blessings of God's kingdom and faithfully serve him in the world. Amen.