

Thine, Not Mine
Palm Sunday, Year A
A Sermon for Every Sunday
Matthew 21:1-11

The version of the Lord's Prayer

Most of us pray each week includes a final phrase

that was a late edition:

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Kingdom.

Power.

Glory.

How would you define these words?

Years ago John Phillip Newell was preaching at St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh.

Standing in the pulpit that hugs one of the massive, thousand-year old pillars of the church,

Rev. Newell began his sermon with these words:

“There will be a time when this building...will be no more.”

“There will be a time when our Scriptures...will be no more.”

“And there will be a time when Christianity...will be no more.”

At this point a woman in the congregation yelled at the top of her lungs,

Heresy!

This, of course, is when the rest of the congregation woke up and actually started *listening* to his sermon.

Rev. Newell could see them whispering to each other, asking,
“What did he say?”

The woman, seated in one of the cathedral’s box pews, after yelling, stood up, opened the little door at the end of her pew, slammed it shut, and stomped down the center aisle in her hard-heeled shoes, shouting one more time before she walked out the door,

“Heresy!”

Reflecting on this experience Newell commented,

“There is a tendency in the West to absolutize our religion.

Instead of viewing it as *a road sign* that points beyond itself,
we consider it *a stop sign*.

It becomes the destination, the end.

And when that happens, [our religion and its practices]
become *confused* with the Ultimate Reality
that is always beyond utterance,
beyond embodiment,
beyond form.”¹

When we pray *Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory*,
we probably associate our typical connotations with these words:

kingdom is a place to rule over,
power is the capacity to control others,
and **glory** is something like fame.

But when we assign **our** meanings to God’s kingdom, power, and glory,
we confuse a road sign pointing beyond itself
with a stop sign marking the destination.

When I was a child, the sixth Sunday of Lent was celebrated as Palm Sunday.

In some ways, it was a warm-up for the celebration of Easter
that came a week later.

We would wave our palms, sing hosannas, and acknowledge,
right along with the original crowd two thousand years ago,
Jesus as king.

And why not? By the time Palm Sunday rolls around,
most of us have failed to keep our Lenten disciplines
and have grown tired of the demands of Lent to turn inward,

¹ John Phillip Newell, *The Rebirthing of God: Christianity’s Struggle for New Beginnings*. SkyLight Paths, 2014.

go deeper, and spend time in our wilderness,
confronting our demons, temptations, and sins.
If it isn't Lent that's gotten us down, then it's the relentless barrage
of depressing news stories: war, natural disasters,
climate change, and leaders
who can't seem to find any way to work together
to effectively serve the people.

By the time Palm Sunday rolls around, who isn't ready for a parade?

When I arrived at seminary nearly twenty years ago,
there was a movement that recommended combining on this day
the commemoration of Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem
with the events that unfolded *after* his arrival,
events that will lead to his death on a cross.

I understand the theological rationale behind this decision,
but it's hard to pull off.

Sixty minutes is not a lot of time to orchestrate a turn
from the joy and relief that comes with finally hearing the crowds
name Jesus for who he is – Lord and King –
to the dismay and disbelief that comes when we realize
that Jesus has come to Jerusalem to die
and the crowd naming his true identity
is the very thing that's going to get him killed.

Jesus entered Jerusalem on the first day of the week during which the Jews
would celebrate Passover, the most holy week of the Jewish year.

He entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey –
An animal considered absurd and ridiculous,
Especially when compared to the majesty
Of a horse.

As he entered, Jesus's way was lined with the frayed cloaks of his
impoverished and rag-tag followers,

who were holding a few branches of straggly palms.
was greeted not with awe and reverence and fear,
shouting and dancing and people asking, 'who is this guy'?
Most of the people who saw Jesus entering Jerusalem
Would not have thought he was the epitome
Of power and glory.
Quite the opposite.

The great Reformer Martin Luther spent a fair amount of time and ink articulating the difference between a theology of glory and a theology of the cross.

According to Luther, a theology of glory looks for God in the strong, the beautiful, and the powerful.

It is concerned with health, happiness, and prosperity;
in other words, with what God can do for us
that will give us more power, more control, more success.

A theology of glory recognizes that there are difficulties in our lives, but it reframes them to somehow take the evil and hurt we experience and transform them into a something that, in the long run at least, is redemptive and ultimately good.

A theology of glory understands God based on our own definitions of power and glory.

By contrast, Luther's theology of the cross understands God in light of what the crucifixion reveals about God.

This theology looks for God in the places where we most feel God's absence: in pain, humiliation, and suffering, in weakness, foolishness, and death.

A theology of the cross is built upon what looks like failure and feels like disaster.

While a theology of glory calls evil good and good evil,
a theology of the cross calls a thing what it is:
death is death, sin is sin,

suffering is suffering, evil is evil.
There is nothing we can do to make them more palatable,
no window dressing that can pretty them up.
But – this is where we find God.²

Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, we are reminding ourselves that
God's kingdom and power and glory are
astonishingly different from ours.

Which is why that one word is so important: *thine*.
Or, in modern language, *yours*.

Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory.

Not mine, not what I want for myself
or what I think is best for the world.

Not how I want God to be powerful and glorious and king of all.
Not the accolades and adoring crowds that came to Jesus
when he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey.

God's kingdom and power and glory can only be understood
when we remember that this is not just a parade,
it is a funeral march.

This same Jesus we glorify today is going to end up
suffering and dying *on a cross*,
the most horrific and evil form of state-sanctioned execution
in his day and time.

Humiliating, excruciating, demoralizing, disgusting, even.
God's kingdom and power and glory cannot be understood
apart from Jesus's death on a cross,
which we do well to remember
every time we say,

Thine.

² Rev. Dr. Delmar Chilton, "Living at Cross Purposes," April 9, 2017 on Day1.org, and *Luther's Theology of the Cross* by Carl R. Trueman, www.opc.org/newhorizons/NH05/10b.html.

Only when we hold together the celebration of Palm Sunday
with the despair of the crucifixion can we recognize that,
like the crowd's choice between releasing Jesus Barabbas
or Jesus of Nazareth, we too must make a choice,
today and every day.

Which Jesus will we follow? Which Jesus will we worship?

Is it the Jesus whose words and actions we twist
to fit our definitions of kingdoms and power and glory?
Or is it the Jesus who redefines these concepts
by revealing the ultimate power and glory of a God
who enters the confusion and chaos and suffering
with us?

In the book *Silence* by Shusako Endo, a young Jesuit priest
named Sebastio Rodrigues is sent to Japan in 1639
to investigate reports that his mentor, another Jesuit missionary,
has renounced his faith.

When he arrives, he discovers that the brutal government
has driven Christians into hiding.

To figure out who are the Christians,
the security forces demand that suspected Christians
trample on a crudely carved image of Christ.
If they refuse, they are slowly tortured to death.

Eventually, Rodrigues is captured and forced to watch
Japanese Christians, members of his own flock,
lay down their lives for the faith.

In addition to torturing Rodrigues,
the Japanese authorities force him to watch
as other Christians are tortured,
telling him that if he will simply renounce his faith,
their torture will stop.

Rodrigues struggles mightily.

He understands and accepts the idea that he must be prepared
to suffer for his own faith,
but he wonders whether it is self-centered and cruel
to refuse to renounce his faith when doing so
causes others to suffer.

Finally, as he listens to the moaning of those who are tortured
until he tramples the image of Christ,
Rodrigues hears Jesus speak to him, saying,
"You may trample. You may trample...You may trample.
It was to be trampled on by men that I was born
into this world.
It was to share men's pain that I carried my cross."

Today, we sing hosanna for a king whose most powerful and glorious act
will be his death on a cross.

So as we enter into this Holy Week, may we remember that all this,
this demented glory,
this inverted power,
this kingdom founded on self-sacrificial love
is not yours or mine.
God, it is *thine*.

Amen.

—Amy Starr Redwine © 2023