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"What the Lord's Prayer means to me"

with focus on:

"Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be Done, on Earth"

Sunday #3 of 5 on the Lord's Prayer

I. INTRO

- A. The scripture portion for our third Sunday on the Lord's Prayer comprises nine words from middle:

"Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be Done, on Earth." Matt 6:10.

- B. Proposed: these nine words frame Jesus' main program, which was to bring what he called the Kingdom of God down to earth, to govern human affairs. And they frame Jesus's main program for us: to make the Kingdom come, as we are to bring it.
- C. Accordingly, these nine words are central to understanding Jesus' ministry. They are one of only two key summaries of Jesus's message in the New Testament. (The other summary, in Matthew 22:34-40 plus Luke 10:25-39, frames the "twin commands" to love God and ones' neighbor as supreme.)

Most Christians don't share this viewpoint. Instead their lodestars are John 3:3 (declaring that one must be born again to see the Kingdom of God); John 3:16 (declaring that faith provides eternal life--"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that everyone who has faith in him will have everlasting life"); Corinthians 15:3 (indicating that Jesus saved believers by his "substitutionary atonement" on the cross--"Christ died for our sins"); or the "Great Commission," Matthew 28:16-20 (we must "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:20). So my view is not a consensus view. But I find it persuasive.

If so, Jesus was centrally concerned with public welfare and public policy in the human sphere and the here and now. Contrary to common assumption, he did not propose to leave public policy to Caesar ("pay unto Caesar that which is Caesar's" Matt. 22:20-22.) Rather, he would have the Jews define it for themselves in accord with God's laws, and in sharp departure from Caesar's laws.

Note: Jesus himself confers greatest authority on Matt. 22:34-40

and Matt 6:10 as key summaries. He defines Matt 6:10 as "how you should pray," and the two commands in Matt 22:34-40 as "the greatest commandment in the law. ... Everything in the Law and the Prophets hangs on these two commandments." I.e., to Jesus these summaries matter most.

D. Who educated/persuaded me:

- > Marcus J. Borg, Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time (1994), chapter 3.
- > Marcus J. Borg, Jesus: Uncovering the Life (2006)
- > Marcus J. Borg and Dominic Crossan, The Last Week (2006)
- > Marcus J. Borg, The Heart of Christianity (2003)
- > Marcus J. Borg, Speaking Christian (2011).
- > Marcus J. Borg, Jesus: A New Vision (1991)
- > Marcus J. Borg, Reading the Bible Again for the First Time (2001).
- > Richard A. Horsley, Jesus and the Spiral of Violence (1993)
- > John Dominic Crossan, The Greatest Prayer (2010)
- > John Dominic Crossan and Richard G. Watts, Who Is Jesus? Answers to Your Questions about the Historical Jesus (1996).

E. My journey: I'm slow, so it took me a while to see the point of the Lord's Prayer.

I grew up hearing Herbert W. Armstrong's incoherent rants about God's Kingdom on the radio. Booooooring,

Finally my mom Mary told me to read Marcus Borg, Meeting Jesus Again. I ignored her for many months but finally got with the program, at age 48, then read more.

Moral of story: listen to your mom.

II. BACKGROUND: ROME SEVERELY OPPRESSED THE PALESTINIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

- A. In Jesus' time Palestinian Jews suffered brutal political repression and economic dispossession of their land and livelihood at the hands of Roman occupiers. (Borg, Jesus: 225-7; Horsley, Spiral, passim.) Jesus's image of Lazarus starving at the gate of a heartless rich man, dogs licking his sores, (Luke 16:19-31) was daily reality.
- B. Revolt was in the air--revolt that would prove self-ruinous.
- C. Rome's oppression replicated a pattern observed throughout the Mideast (Egypt, Canaan, Mesopotamia) and the world, since the 4th millennium BCE: cruel and oppressive ancient agricultural domination systems, ruling rapaciously with merciless brutality. In the dispossession and violence inflicted on ancient Palestine's Jews I see parallels to violence in Mississippi and civil war in Guatemala and Northern Ireland. My takeaway: If

dispossession and violence are pervasive they become the dominant concern, the urgent topic of all conversation.

III. BACKGROUND: JESUS' BELIEVED GOD RULED HEAVEN WITH COMPASSION, JUSTICE, INCLUSION AND PEACE

- A. Jesus thought God centered four main values and ruled heaven by these values. Accordingly, Jesus centered these values in his own program.
1. **Compassion** (Borg, Meeting: 46-68; Borg, Jesus: 175-8). Jesus preached against the Jewish purity system, a caste-type system that defined many as outcast, by advising instead compassion for all.
 2. **Justice**. (Borg, Jesus: 185-90; Borg, Heart of Christianity: 126-48.) Justice especially for those without means or power: the widow, the orphan, the poor, the dispossessed, the political prisoner, the outcast.
 3. **Inclusion of those who are different or outcast**: the ritually unclean (often meaning the poor), Samaritans, women, Roman centurions, Syro-Phoenicians (the Syro-Phoenician woman), Roman collaborators (Jewish tax collectors), those injured and bleeding (on the Jericho road). (Borg, Meeting Jesus: 46-68; Borg, Jesus: 246.)
 Jesus included the wealthy as well, if they didn't participate in Roman oppression (e.g., Susanna, Joanna, Mary Magdalene). Jesus' sharp comment that the rich could more easily pass through the eye of a needle than enter heaven was aimed, not at ethically-behaving wealth-creators but at those who exploited their ties to Roman power to enslave and steal their way to wealth. (Borg, Jesus, p. 244.) Think Simon Legree.
 Only Rome's top rulers were fully on the wrong side of Jesus. (Herod Antipas, the murderer of John the Baptizer, was a "skunk." Borg, Jesus: 94.)
 4. **Peace** (Borg, New Vision: 137-40, 174; Borg, Jesus: 130-32).
- B. Jesus's prayer that "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" called for bringing the compassion, justice, inclusion and peace by which God ruled heaven down to this earth.
- C. Jesus' call echoed the strong calls in the Pentateuch and the Prophets for compassion, justice, inclusion and peace. The Jews had been plagued by domination systems, and had resisted them, from the beginning.

V. JESUS' STRATEGY FOR BRINGING THE KINGDOM TO EARTH: RADICAL SOLIDARITY PLUS NONVIOLENCE

- A. Humans on earth, the Jews of Galilee and their allies, would

bring the Kingdom to earth.

John the Baptizer had hoped to catalyze divine intervention. Jesus differed, believing in transformation by human action.

- B. Before Jesus four Jewish strategies for resisting Rome contended. None were working, and none showed much promise.
1. **Sadducee** strategy: conciliate Rome, collaborate with Rome.
 2. **Pharisee** strategy: out-wait Rome mainly by observing strict hyper-practice of Jewish law and custom, even if this weakened the Jewish ability to resist and endure.
 3. **Essene** strategy: hide from Roman power by withdrawing into the desert wilderness, where strict hyper-practice would maintain group cohesion.
 4. The **Zealot** strategy: violent revolution. This strategy was attempted in 4 BCE, 66 CE, 117 CE and 132 CE and failed disastrously.
- C. Jesus' new strategy: out-wait Rome, using radical solidarity plus nonviolence.
- Jesus strategy was to out-wait Roman rule, much as the Jews had outwaited without using violence and thus had survived Roman and Persian rule (see the book of Daniel). His means:
1. Pursue radical solidarity. Share your food with your starving neighbor even at the risk of starving later yourself. (Matt 6:31: "Do not ask 'what are we to eat? What are we to drink?") Go to extremes to resolve conflicts with your fellow villagers ("Love your enemies," Matt. 5:44.) Lock arms everyone!
 2. Pursue nonviolence. Do acts of subtle, below-radar resistance (Matt. 6:390-42: turn the other cheek, go the extra mile. Borg, Jesus: 247-51), but take care not to provoke Roman violence.
- D. Jesus' supporting tactics:
1. Pursue hyper-practice of Jewish religious laws and customs, Intensify the Torah, to harden group solidarity. Like Polish Catholics under Soviet occupation during the Cold War. (Borg, Jesus: 228.)
 2. Forge alliances with all possible allies. Jesus's inclusiveness allowed him to recruit widely from every group in Palestine oppressed by Rome.
 3. Set priorities pragmatically. Set aside religious rules whose observance would weaken the Jewish ability to resist and survive Roman rule. E.g.,
 - > the rule requiring tithing to the pro-Roman Temple authorities (Borg, Jesus: 245.)
 - > the rule that forbade even the hungry from gleaning fields on the sabbath.
 This defined a difference between Jesus and the Pharisees.
 4. Use best communication practices:
 - a. Socratic teaching style, through seminars about parables. Socratic is far the best teaching style; also the hardest.

Jesus was up to it.

- b. Street theater, i.e., "prophetic acts," e.g., riding the donkey into Jerusalem, then flipping the tables of the money changers at the Temple, during the last week. Borg, Jesus: 232-36.
5. Work in secret. Jesus remarked that the Kingdom of Heaven is a seed growing secretly underground. He likely was indicating that the Jewish resistance movement should grow unseen by the Romans (Borg, Jesus: 257.) He conducted his ministry in remote rural areas, far from Roman eyes.
6. Sell his strategy of radical solidarity to the Jewish flock by persuading them that radical solidarity will be self-feeding. Compassion will be self-catalyzing. From a small beginning, radical solidarity will spread. Jesus remarked in parables that the Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed, or a yeast in flour: it can grow spontaneously from few to many, small to great Borg, Jesus: 257.)

V. IMPLICATIONS

- A. Jesus's was focused on making a kinder world, and called on people (not God, fond as he was of God) to do it. Thus he was calling his flock to action, not just belief. Works, not faith alone.
- B. In addition to everything else, Jesus was a fabulous social/political leader and brilliant political strategist.
- C. Jesus' teachings, grounded on radical solidarity, are what we need today.
 - 1, Con: if SVE is right, Jesus framed solutions to a bygone problem: the brutal Roman dictatorship in ancient Palestine. He's irrelevant.
 2. Pro: Never in human history has human welfare depended so greatly on cooperation within and among civilizations. Hence Jesus' call for radical solidarity has special relevance to modern times.

The human capacity to destroy has greatly increased in the last century. As a result humans have acquired multifarious new powers to ruin creation--by nuclear war, bio-engineered pathogens, changing the climate, or sowing the environment with chemical toxins, to name a few. The global commons (the global environment, global public health, etc.) are threatened as never before. Global cooperation to protect these "commons" is mandatory. Jesus' call for radical solidarity among peoples applies more strongly than ever. Jesus was the prophet for our times in more ways than one.