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

A Call for a Kingdomist Christian Movement

Sunday #3 of 5 on the Lord's Prayer

## I. SUMMARY INTRO

A. The scripture portion for our third Pilgrim Sunday on the Lord's Prayer comprises 14 words from middle of the prayer:

**"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."** Matthew 6:10.

B. These fourteen words from the Lord's Prayer frame Jesus' main program for the world. That program was to bring what Jesus called the Kingdom of God to earth to shape human affairs. In Jesus's time the Roman empire ruled Palestine with great cruelty, exclusion, injustice and violence. Jesus believed that God centered four opposite ethics: compassion, inclusion, justice, and peace (more on this later). By praying that "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth" Jesus called for the coming of a new order in which God's compassion, justice, inclusion and peace would replace Rome's brutal tyranny,

These fourteen words also frame Jesus's main assignment to his followers: to bring the Kingdom to earth. It was their job (as well as God's job) to create the Kingdom. Jesus called his followers to be what might be called "Kingdomists"--bringers of God's heavenly kingdom of compassion, justice, inclusion and peace to this world. He urged that followers give bringing the kingdom top priority: "Set your mind on God's kingdom and his justice before everything else." (Matt. 6:33.)

C. Accordingly, these fourteen words are key to interpreting Jesus' ministry. They are one of two essential summaries of Jesus's message in scripture.

(The other essential summary, in Matthew 22:34-40 plus Luke 10:25-39, frames as supreme the "twin commands" to love God and one's neighbor. It echoes "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth," as loving one's neighbor expresses the basic values of the kingdom--compassion, inclusion, justice, and peace--toward the neighbor, and so frames included elements of God's Kingdom. The two summaries are parallel thoughts.)

Most Christians privilege other summaries over these two. 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 from their sins by dying on the cross--"Christ died for our sins"); or the "Great Commission," Matt. 28:16-20 and Acts 1:8 (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).

However, Jesus himself points to the passages in Matt. 6:10 and Matt. 22:34-40/Luke 10:25-39 as the lodestars to follow. He defines the Lord's Prayer, including "Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be Done, on Earth" as "how you should pray"--a weighty statement, as it defines Jesus's advice on what his flock should say in their most important conversation, their prayer with God, in which they frame their deepest hopes and dreams for the world. And Jesus defines the twin commands in Matt. 22:34-40 and Luke 10:25-39 as "the greatest commandment(s) in the law. ... Everything in the Law and the Prophets hangs on these two commandments." (Matt. 22:36, 40.) By these words Jesus flagged Matt. 6:10 and Matt. 22:34-40/Luke 10:25-39--not John 3:3, John 3:16, Corinthians 15:3, Matthew 28:16-20 or Acts 1:8--as the essential guideposts.

If so, Jesus was centrally concerned with human welfare and public policy in the here and now. Contrary to common assumption, Jesus did not propose to leave public policy to Caesar ("pay unto Caesar that which is Caesar's" Matt. 22:20-22.) Rather, he thought the Jews should define public policy for themselves in accord with God's laws, and in sharp departure from Caesar's laws. (Borg, Jesus: 238-40.)

D. Who enlightened me on these issues:

- > 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).
- > Marcus J. Borg, Evolution of the Word: The New Testament in the Order the Books Were Written (2012)
- > John Dominic Crossan and Richard G. Watts, Who Is Jesus? Answers to Your Questions about the Historical Jesus (1996).
- > John Dominic Crossan, "Jesus and the Kingdom: Itinerants and Householders in Earliest Christianity," in Marcus J. Borg, ed., Jesus at 2000 (1997): 21-53 at 33-40.
- > John Dominic Crossan, The Greatest Prayer (2010)
- > Richard A. Horsley, Jesus and the Spiral of Violence (1993)

E. My journey to these views: 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 AM 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. I read chapter 3. Then I 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 unjust 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 in the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, (Luke 16:19-31) was daily reality.

B. Revolt was in the air--foreshadowing later Jewish rebellions in 66-73 CE and 132-35 CE that would prove self-ruinous. (Crossan, "Jesus and the Kingdom": 28-9.)

C. Rome's oppression replicated a phenomenon observed throughout the Mideast (Egypt, Canaan, Mesopotamia) and the world, since the 4th millennium BCE: cruel and oppressive ancient agricultural domination systems, ruled with great rapacity and brutality by small wealthy elites. (Borg, Jesus: 79-86; and Borg, Heart of Christianity: 129-31.)

The dispossession and violence inflicted on ancient Palestine's Jews has parallels to more modern violence in Mississippi and the civil wars in Guatemala and Northern Ireland, which I witnessed. My takeaways from those cases: If dispossession and violence are pervasive they become the dominant community concern, the urgent topic of all conversation. Jesus's ministry to Palestinian Jews spoke directly to these concerns.

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

A. Jesus believed that 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. **Inclusion of those who are different or outcast**: the ritually unclean (often meaning the poor), Samaritans, women, Roman centurions, Syrophoenicians (the Syrophoenician woman in Tyre, Mark 7:24-29), 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., Joseph of Arimathea, Susanna, Joanna, and Zacchaeus. Borg, Jesus: 145). Jesus' sharp comment that the rich could more easily pass through the eye of a needle than enter the kingdom of God (Matt. 19:24) 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. (Jesus refers to Herod Antipas, the murderer of John the Baptizer, as a "skunk." Borg, Jesus: 94.)

3. **Justice.** (Borg, Jesus: 185-90; Borg, Heart of Christianity: 126-48; Crossan, "Jesus and the Kingdom": 27-8.) Justice especially for those without means or power: the widow, the orphan, the poor, the dispossessed, the political prisoner, the outcast.
4. **Peace** (Borg, New Vision: 137-40, 174; Borg, Jesus: 230-32). By "peace" Jesus thought broadly of nonviolence toward others and also reconciliation and harmony with others.

B. Jesus's prayer that "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" called for bringing the compassion, inclusion, justice, and peace by which God ruled heaven down to rule human affairs on earth as well.

Borg summarizes Jesus's Kingdom of God as "what life would be like on earth if God were king, and the kingdoms of this world, the domination systems of this world, were not." The Kingdom is "a transformed world, a world of justice and plenty and peace, where everybody has enough and where, in the striking phrase of the prophet Micah, 'No one shall make them afraid.'" Jesus: 187, 252.

In John Dominic Crossan's phrase, Jesus's Kingdom was "how this world here below would be run if God, not Caesar, sat in its imperial throne." (Crossan, "Jesus and the Kingdom": 33-4.)

C. Jesus' call echoed the strong calls in the Pentateuch and the Prophets for compassion, inclusion justice, and peace. The Jewish community had been plagued by their own and others' domination systems, and had resisted them, from the beginning. (On expressions of this resistance in the Hebrew Bible see Borg, Jesus: 97-105.)

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

A. Human action by the Jews of Galilee and their allies would bring the Kingdom to earth.

Jesus's mentor John the Baptizer had hoped to catalyze divine intervention that alone would bring the kingdom to the world. Jesus differed, believing that bringing the Kingdom also required human effort. (Crossan and Watts, Who Is Jesus?: 34-9; Borg, Jesus: 259-60.)

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 offered a fifth strategy: to out-wait and out-last Rome's occupation, without violence, until Rome collapsed or withdrew its imperial control of Palestine. Centuries earlier the Jews had peacefully outwaited and out-lasting Babylonian and Persian rule, and thus survived it (see the book of Daniel, *passim*). Jesus's strategy against Rome was parallel.

Jesus's means:

1. Pursue radical solidarity. Share your food with your starving neighbor even at the risk of starving later yourself. (Matt. 6:31, 33: "Do not ask anxiously 'What are we to eat? What are we to drink?' ... Set your mind on God's kingdom and his justice before everything else, and all the rest will come to you as well.") Go to extremes to resolve conflicts with your fellow villagers ("Love your enemies," Matt. 5:44.)  
Lock arms everyone! (On community solidarity among Jesus's followers see Horsley, Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: 209-84. See pp. 259-60 for a summary of Jesus's calls for nondefensive sharing and mutual assistance--i.e., radical solidarity.)
2. Pursue nonviolence. Do acts of subtle, below-radar resistance (turn the other cheek, go the extra mile. Matt. 5:39-42: Borg, Jesus: 247-51), but take care not to provoke Roman violence. Never resist the Romans with force.

D. Jesus' supporting tactics:

1. Pursue hyper-practice of Jewish religious laws and customs. Intensify the Torah, to harden group solidarity. (Intensified practice was likewise used by the Catholic church to resist British colonial rule in Ireland and Soviet rule in Poland 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.) This rule played Rome's game by deepening the Jews' poverty, which left more Jews unable to pay Rome's taxes. This accelerated Rome's foreclosure of Jews' farmlands for tax nonpayment.
  - > the rule that forbade even the hungry from gleaning fields on the sabbath. Again, this deepened Jewish poverty, weakening the Jews' ability to resist and outlast Rome.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. Most of his parables were prompts to group discussion of ethics and religious practice. Often Jesus left his own views unstated. Instead his followers were challenged to think the issues through themselves.
  - 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. Pursue grass roots organizing. Jesus was a devoted grass roots organizer and institution-builder. He recruited and patiently mentored his disciples (who needed it!) and other followers. He taught followers how to organize and sent them out to do it. A recent book by Leslie Crutchfield, How Change Happens (Wiley, 2018, pp. 21-51) emphasizes that successful social movements must develop and organize grass roots support. Jesus was 2000 years early with the thought.
6. Work in secret. Jesus remarked that the Kingdom of God 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.
7. Sell this strategy of radical solidarity to the Jewish flock by persuading them that radical solidarity will be self-feeding, hence a strategy of radical solidarity is feasible and practical. Pursuing it would not be wasted effort. From small beginnings radical solidarity would spread. Thus Jesus remarked in parables that the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, or a yeast in flour. (Borg, Jesus: 257.) What he likely meant was that once begun the kingdom would spontaneously grow from a something small to something great. It would be self-catalyzing and self-reinforcing. Modest effort would produce big results.

## V. IMPLICATIONS

A. Jesus was focused on making a kinder world, and called on his fellow-humans (not God, fond as he was of God) to create it. Thus he was calling his flock to action, not just belief. Works, not faith alone. He agreed with the Letter of James, not Martin Luther, on this issue. (For color on faith vs. works see Borg, Evolution of the Word: 121-3.)

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. Rome vanished long ago. It's disappearance made Jesus irrelevant to the current world.

2. Pro: Never in human history has the welfare of human civilization depended so greatly on cooperation within and among groups and nations. Hence Jesus' call for radical solidarity has special relevance to modern times.

By developing modern technology humans have greatly increased their capacity to dominate and manipulate the natural world over the last two centuries. Humans have used this technology to devise means to vastly improve human health, welfare and quality of life. However, with these blessings humans have also acquired multifarious new powers to destroy 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 and urgent. Jesus' call for radical solidarity among peoples applies more strongly than ever. Jesus was the prophet for our times in more ways than one.

3. Pro: the danger of destructive rule by cruel oligarchs, as the Palestinian Jews suffered under Roman rule, is never far away. When power and wealth become concentrated, the danger appears that the powerful will use their strength to seize yet more power and wealth, until freedom, dignity and justice for the majority are erased. This pattern has recurred worldwide since the fourth millennium BCE as ancient agricultural domination systems appeared across the globe, e.g., in Egypt, Mesopotamia, the great river civilizations of South Asia and China, and in Central America. The elites of these ancient agricultural

domination systems used their surplus wealth to hire gendarmes, through whom they ruled by violence and came to control most wealth, while commoners suffered in destitution. Wealth was a cumulative resource: those who first gained wealth could parlay it into coercive political power, which they used to take more wealth, which they used to take more power, until a highly stratified dictatorship emerged, run with great cruelty by a tiny ultra-wealthy ~1% elite. (Borg, Uncovering the Life: 79-86; Borg, Heart of Christianity: 129-31; Borg and Crossan, Last Week: 15-16.) The Jews from time immemorial, and then Jesus, worked to resist such a slide toward tyranny. (On expressions of this Jewish resistance in the Hebrew Bible see Borg, Jesus: 97-105.)

The threat of tyrannical rule by plutocrats seemed bygone as democracies emerged around the world in the 19th and 20th centuries, and social and economic stratification diminished accordingly. However, since around 1980, and especially, since around 2000, this trend has reversed. Authoritarian oligarchs have seized power in states that once seemed headed toward democracy, including Russia, Venezuela, Turkey, and Hungary. Authoritarian oligarchs have also gained large influence in India, Brazil, and the Philippines. Often they have used their power to loot their countries, amassing great wealth for themselves (think Russia's Vladimir Putin and the Philippines' Marcos family). Even in the U.S. an authoritarian movement has arisen that seems to intend to end democracy and impose authoritarian rule.

Jesus's ministry, with its emphasis on compassion, inclusion, justice, and peace, offers a counter-program: a society of compassion, justice, inclusion and peace in which none rule by force and all have a place of dignity, acceptance and belonging.

#### D. Needed: A Kingdomist Movement in Christianity

Bringing the Kingdom to earth was Jesus's main program. If so, a Jesus-following Christianity should somewhere include a Kingdomist movement, dedicated to promoting the Kingdomist mission.

Kingdomism is hardly absent from current Christian practice. Christianity has Kingdomist-flavored denominations and churches, including much of the United Church of Christ and much of the American Black church. And many Christian denominations feature elements of Kingdomism, including most mainstream Protestant denominations (sadly not most evangelical or Orthodox

denominations) and the Roman Catholic tradition. But no current Christian denomination is mindfully centered on Kingdomism. It's time to create one.