

**Sermon: “Let Me Surrender to Your Will”****Scripture: I Timothy 2:1-7****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: September 19, 2010**

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The writer of I Timothy, who scholars think is probably not Paul but one of his followers, commends his readers, in the scripture for this morning, to pray to God for the kings and rulers and people in high positions of his day, “that we may lead” he says, “a peaceful and quiet life, which is good and pleasing to God.” At first it sounds like a nice and innocent enough request, a request that we too can hear well on this the Sunday before the International Day for Peace. And we should be praying for our world leaders. But we have to be aware as well that there is a subversive subtext to this request of the writer of I Timothy when it is heard with first century Mediterranean ears. And you’ve heard me say this before – for this writer to say “we should prayer for our leaders that they enact God’s will for our lives, God’s peace,” was to clarify that our leaders aren’t God. Now I realize in this day and age that there are very few if any of us who live under the illusion that our leaders are gods, or god-like, or enacting God’s will, (more likely people are thinking quite the opposite, but in the ancient pagan world the Emperor or the King were in fact self-proclaimed gods to whom the people were very much expected to bow as their Lord and Savior. It was understood that to live in the peaceful quiet life of Rome in the first century was to live within the saving grace of Caesar whose power established the Pax Romana, the Peace of Rome. And it was to Caesar that your full devotion and allegiance lay. He was the Son of God, the Lord of Life, the Prince of Peace.

And so for the writer of this letter to tell the congregation to pray to God, the overarching sovereign, for Caesar, the lesser sovereign, that he would rule in such a way to bring peace and the things of God to fruition was a bit subversive to say the least. For Patty Horseford each Sunday morning to proclaim “Jesus is Lord” sounds nice and everything but even now its really very revolutionary, because the subtext to what she is saying in our modern day – if you don’t mind me outing you Patty – is that capitalism or the market is not Lord, nor is the Land of the Free Lord, nor Obama, nor Glen Beck, nor World Peace and nonviolence even, or anything else that we tend to give our allegiance

to, but Jesus is Lord! You didn't know Patty was a covert revolutionary sitting in our midst did you?!

The letter to Timothy goes on – “For there is only one God and there is only one mediator between God and men and that is Jesus Christ who gave himself as a ransom for all.” And what does that mean? Not that we as Christians are necessarily the one true people or own the one true religion, but rather it means, that our lives and our world, the past, present and future, are now defined not by the rule of this empire or that one, not determined by the hand of the market or the wars fought and won, but rather it's all defined ultimately by this strange and remarkable moment when God revealed Godself as coming to us in vulnerability and love as revealed in the cross and that through the resurrection, the greatest threat and weapon of the empire, Death, has now been transcended or rendered meaningless. It's a new day that has dawned where death is no longer the defining moment, but God's activity in the world that transcends even the great divide between life and death.

Over my sabbatical, as I had mentioned I would, I worked with some of the texts of Thomas Cary Kinder and set about 4 of them to music. This is one of those and I think it speaks to God's activity in the world and our need to be allied with that activity so that we can be used by God for a new thing: it's called “God Makes a Highway Through the Sea”.

God makes a highway in the sea,  
Runs rivers through dry sand.  
What new thing will God do through me?  
Faith waits to understand.  
God needs me to be unconfined  
And free to pour love out.  
New miracles come when my mind  
Moves past its fear and doubt.

My grasping hands, my craving heart  
Find peace when they let go.  
I gain more power the more I part  
With all I have and know.  
Faith learns the Spirit's way through Christ,  
Strange truth of gain through loss,  
New meaning through life sacrificed,  
Love's triumph through each cross.

All those who put their faith in towers,  
 In weapons and in gold  
 Know nothing of the Spirit's powers  
 Beyond their clinging hold.  
 What new thing will God do through me?  
 What river through my sand?  
 May Christ flow through me, strong and free.  
 May love empower my hand.

The question might not be so much “what will we make of our lives” but instead what will God do through us and our most important work is to keep the channels open within ourselves, to keep ourselves vulnerable enough to notice and go with that flow of God that is wanting to sweep our lives away. God becomes the defining center around which our lives revolve and evolve. It's not the nation nor the political or economic system, nor is it the self that is center but God. It's all about God. And yet so much of God is so far beyond our ability to grasp and understand. How do we place such an immense mystery at the center? And that is a good question, maybe THE good question. It definitely requires humility to do that. It requires an acknowledgement that we don't have all the answers. It requires a willingness to grasp only lightly on to the answers we think we have found. It probably means being willing to be lead a little more by the unifying heart than by the polarizing dissecting mind.

Could the path to peace in this world, in our lives, be the way of submission to a will, a presence, greater than our own. We know that can be the path to tyranny and violence as well – how much horror has been done and how many warped views have been promoted in the name of submitting to a will larger than our own. But that doesn't mean its not the path, it just might mean that the path is a narrow and difficult one to follow. And then also, to be fair though, we must ask how much tyranny and bloodshed has resulted from the view that there is no one to whom we are accountable but ourselves. It seems to me that the razor's edge is to walk into the unknown, seeking to humbly live a life in submission to great mystery of God coupled with a commitment to do no violence, to do no harm. Then our redemption, our deliverance, however it might come, will not be at the expense of someone else, which in God's economy must be the way it works... it must be....

Antje Duvekot is a folk singer from down south who has a lovely song I learned over the summer called ReasonLand which nudges us in this direction. She sets up the tension between a King who has all the worldly power he could want but cannot know the peace of the one who is willing to be the instrument of something larger and to look for deliverance not from the mighty but from the mystical unknown. She says “the mighty king came down to the sea, said I may win any battle that I please. I’ve got a hundred man battalion, they all fall down at my knees but there’s a songbird who will not sing for me.” And then the chorus: “so won’t you lay me down in a fiddler’s cloud and float me out to sea. Let my aching head be still, let me surrender to your will. Float me out and deliver me.”

The Reasonland's emperor came down  
 To the water's edge and said, "I don't know where I'm bound  
 I've got emeralds and rubies sewn into my gown  
 But I am sadder than the diamonds in my crown

So will you lay me down in a fiddler's cloud  
 And float me out to sea  
 Let my aching head be still, let me surrender to your will  
 Float me out and deliver me"

A mighty king came down to the sea  
 Said, "I may win any battle that I please  
 I got a hundred-man batallion, they all fall down at my feet  
 But there’s a songbird who will not sing for me

So will you lay me down in a fiddler's cloud  
 And float me out to sea  
 Let my aching head be still, let me surrender to your will  
 Float me out and deliver me

I wanna fly out to your center  
 I wanna sink down into your gold  
 I wanna go down without my dagger  
 I wanna shed these clothes"

The preacher's wife kneeled down by the waves  
 Said, "For your love and salvation I have prayed  
 I am a tired tightrope dancer, I wanna go no more this way  
 Just give me something, a penny for my faith

Pastoral Prayer:

We offer up, O Heart of This World, a prayer of supplication that...

your spirit of peace and reconciliation will descend upon each of our individual selves as we are so often divided within by fears and pressures and concerns of daily life and too often our response to such dividedness is to make it someone else's problem;

and so may your spirit of peace and reconciliation descend also upon each of our homes. Wherever there is conflict or hidden anger beneath the surface of our homes, give us the courage to face it openly and with humility, in the spirit of Christ,

so that your spirit of peace and reconciliation may be with us and extend throughout our town, states and our country that the tension created in hard economic times will bring about deeper community rather than deeper enmity,

and may your spirit of peace and reconciliation descend upon our global family as we remember through You our allegiance to this one earth and hear our concern and prayers specifically for that holy land far away that as those leaders take tentative steps towards more talks of peace, that something remarkable and of your spirit may enter into those proceedings and inaugurate the dawning of a new day.... All of this we pray in Jesus' name, our Prince of Peace, Amen.