

Second Sunday after Pentecost  
June 14, 2009  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Buffalo, New York  
The Rev. Eric Olaf Olsen

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Amen.

Lately I have been walking a little hunched over because my back has been acting up. I attribute the pain and to an old college Rugby injury. I played Rugby because I thought it was the toughest of sports and I thought it fit my self image. When I was in Japan, however, I found a sport that was even tougher - Australian Rules football. The beauty of Australian Rules is that there are virtually no rules! It is probably a good thing that I never had the opportunity to play, or who knows what other injuries I would be nursing!

Sometimes we view the world, as being devoid of rules. We have only to turn on the news and hear the angry chants of protestors following the compromised elections in Iran. North Korea blatantly disregards international treaties and conducts another nuclear test... We witness a doctor (George Tiller) being murdered in (reformation Lutheran) Church while serving as an usher, by a person who professes to be a guardian of human life... We see teenagers in Lockport murdering their counselor, 24 year old Renee Greco for \$160. We are horrified as another human being murders a fellow human being (Stephen Johns) for his vocation of guarding a memorial to victims of genocide. (The National Holocaust Memorial) And we have to ask.... Are there any rules? Or perhaps, who rules?

In the Gospel lesson we see Jesus referring to the Kingdom of God... while we usually understand the word *basileia* to mean kingdom and think of a far off land, like the Magic Kingdom where Mickey presides in sunny Florida, *basileia* can also be understood as power or rule. So the question we need to consider today is, "Who and what is under God's rule?"

In the gospel lesson we find Mark's final two examples of the *basileia of God* (God's reign or power). Both are concerned with growth. It is God's power that grows the seed and makes the small seed great. It reminds us ultimately that God's power is the primary power or the effective cause in creation, something that we often lose sight of. If we do well in life, we usually are quick to attribute what we have done to our hard work, our knowledge, our honed skill set, our insight, our *wonderfulness*....

But would anything at all be possible without God's power? ...Without the gift of life, the gift of breath, the gift of intellect, the gift of ..... You name it.

Luther once commented on primary verse the secondary cause and said that if the Vine grower (God) didn't allow the sap to flow through the vine (Christ) to a branch (us) it would wither and die.

In a day and age where many things have been ripped out of our hands.... Our illusion of security after 9/11, our economic security, during this recent recession, our health security, with pandemic diseases such as HIV and Aids and now the swine flu.... We are well poised to relate well and welcome the words of the prophet Ezekiel. As you recall, his words are spoken at a time when the people of Israel had everything ripped away. In fact, many of the people themselves were ripped away from the land and brought into exile in Babylon. The prophet reminds us that God's children are not forgotten by the Almighty. God will act and will provide the security that is desperately needed. This is an end time reference about what will happen on the "Day of the Lord". What is this twig that is planted that becomes the mighty cedar that provides refuge for all of the nomadic animals of the air and gives them rest? It is none other than the cross of Christ. It is the place where we will also find safety and assurance on judgment day. It is the place that brings us power to live and hope to survive and even thrive today. It is where God rules with mercy! The cross redefines the correct use of power for us. God rules with ultimate power in overcoming evil with good. On the cross, Christ embraces violence and hatred with open loving arms. God even swallows up death, to free us from our fear of annihilation by insisting that Jesus rise after he took in all the broken deadly shards. In the shadow of the cross we see and experience the dawn of Easter morning.

Embracing the power of God is accepting the gracious will of God.

On July 17, 1538 Luther was suffering greatly. He was aware of the irregularity of his pulse and was consoled by the physician. He [Luther] responded, "I'm subject to the will of God. I've given myself up to him altogether. He'll take care of everything. I'm sure that he won't die because he is himself life and resurrection. Whoever lives and believes in him shall not die; though he die, yet shall he live [John 11:25]. Therefore I submit to his will."<sup>1</sup>

Mark's gospel does not have any resurrection appearances per se, but the faith community that gathered to recall Jesus' teaching would see the power of the resurrection being explained by Jesus in these parables.

Do you feel this power today, can you perceive it. Do you welcome it? Like Christ and Paul and all who accepted and embraced the reign of God in their lives, the more we assent to this power, the more we submit to insisting on living and breathing the Gospel of love, reconciliation, equality, forgiveness and peace the more we will be at odds with the powers of the world that lie (literally) in opposition to God. We will struggle, we will be rejected, and we will be scared and ridiculed. But we will be in good company and judgment day will be like every other day living under the shadow of the cross, in the early morning light of Easter. Our judge will call us friend and brother or sister. Our wounds will be healed, our pains vanquished, our struggles conquered, our fears relieved and our tears wiped away.

---

<sup>1</sup>Luther, M. (1999, c1967). *Vol. 54: Luther's works, vol. 54 : Table Talk* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Vol. 54, Page 294). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

With nothing to fear and with the power of God accessible to us, let us embrace God's efforts to grow us into the kind of Christian witnesses that the world so desperately needs. Let us allow our priorities to shift away from self rule to God rule. Let us live to please God instead of just pleasing ourselves. Let the plight of the suffering be our concern. Let us not hoard our talents, our treasures and time, but let us employ them to the greatest extent that we can in order to further the kingdom of God. Let us be the symbols of hope that the world needs.

The honest truth is that our church and we, as individuals, are not living up to our potential.

Michelangelo, when asked how he could make such beautiful sculpture replied that the beautiful sculptures were already there, he just removed the excess. The Danish theologian and Pastor Soren Kierkegaard, said, "The truth already lies within the student."

The power of the spirit given to us in baptism and the calling that we receive in baptism has limitless potential.

There is so much more that we can be "in Christ". We can help transform this neighborhood, this city, this county, this nation, this world in God's service. We can easily solve our budget crisis, we have the money to balance our church budget for ministry, but we need to take it from our pocket and offer it up for use in the kingdom. We have the brain power and the compassion to work tirelessly to comfort the lonely, be they in nursing homes, on the street or living next door. We have the courage to confront violence and teach love. We can help feed the many hungry and work to help house the homeless. We can use our political and business connections to help further more than just our agenda, we can help further God's agenda.

Mother Theresa of Calcutta, the winner of the Nobel prize for peace, was a small woman, humble before God but a brave and tenacious fighter for the Lord. She did not bow to earthly power easily. She looked with her eyes in her immediate surroundings on the slum streets and saw a need. There were children starving on the street without parents or caregivers. They were dying. She went to her superiors with a vision for an orphanage and said, "I have three pennies and a dream from God to build an orphanage." – Resources as small as a mustard seed. Her superiors chided gently, "You can't build an orphanage with three pennies... with three pennies you can't do anything." "I know", she said smiling, "but with God and three pennies I can do anything."

Let those with ears to hear, listen.

Amen.