

Column

In a recent Bible study, I was asked my thoughts on our Lord's Second Coming. The topic seems to have gained fresh attention since the start of the new war in the Middle East. People are naturally trying to make sense of where this crazy world is going and where God is in this chaos.

My response to anyone who asks about the Second Coming is: Yes! Of course, I believe it draws nearer and nearer with each passing day. It is the blessed hope of all Christians, past and present. It is proclaimed in scripture and joyfully anticipated in the central act of Christian worship, the Eucharist or Lord's Supper. We, therefore, need to be vigilant and ready.

With that said and perhaps even more importantly, we need to be mindful that the true King is already reigning. "The LORD reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof," begins Psalm 97. Even a cursory tour of the Bible will reveal a lot of kingdom language, language about God's sovereign rule.

In the New Testament, a prime example is found in Jesus' Model Prayer. Here, the Master instructs His followers to say: "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." But what do these words mean? What is being asked in this petition?

After all, thinking back to Psalm 97, God's sovereign reign is already operative. Why then does Jesus ask us to pray for it? Our answer comes when we remember that God's good creation has two dimensions, God's space – heaven – and ours – earth. The problem is not with God's, but with ours.

This second – earth -- might be thought of as enemy-occupied territory. Man's rebellion against God as pictured in the early chapters of Genesis has resulted in a schism which God purposes to mend. According to Revelation 21:2, in the end, the city of God will come

down and be joined to earth. At that time, the veil between these two spheres will be done away. But what about now?

If we know our Bible, earth and heaven have already come together in one point . . . in Jesus, the God-man. Under the old order, God was uniquely present in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. This inner chamber was one of those ‘thin spots’ where heaven and earth overlapped. Jesus is the new and better Temple. “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men,” says the seer in Revelation 21:3.

More than that, with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, all those who are ‘in Christ’ are part of this spiritual temple. “Ye are the temple of God,” says Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:16.

Hence, when we pray: “Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” we are – in the first instance – asking that this bit of earth called “me” be put under God’s sovereign rule.

But this thought might be expanded to include that community of which all baptised people are members, the Church. Might we not also ask that the Church be made an effective instrument of bringing God’s sovereign rule to bear on earth?

Christians in a geographic location might be thought of as a colony of heaven. The task of this on-the-ground community is to be an advance sign of God’s coming, universal sovereign rule. As God’s image-bearing creatures now renewed in Christ, we are to lead the world in singing right praise to the Creator . . . to bring a little bit of heaven to earth.

Jesus IS coming again as the signs along the roadside proclaim, no less than do the creeds of the Church. Our job is not to speculate the day or the hour (though we should always have our eye on the eastern sky) but to bear witness of Him in church and nation in the time given to us. What will He find YOU doing ‘when He comes’?

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick [living] and dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen. (Collect, Advent 1, Book of Common Prayer)

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.