

## TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Isaiah 45:1-7

*“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done.”*

We pray each week, *“Thy kingdom come”* and *“Thy will be done.”* The Small Catechism reminds us that this happens *“indeed without our prayer, of itself.”* But how often aren't we too impatient to accept that God can and will act without our advice, help, and prodding. We get nervous when life seems to contradict our idea of God's kingdom coming and will being done, and nervous people can't help but plan. We feel helpless, and helpless people have nothing but time to Monday-morning-quarterback God. Yet the fact remains that God's kingdom comes and His will is done of itself, in spite of our attempts to nudge and guide it along.

Vernon Howell had gone out west to be a rock star, but failed. He joined of a cult in Waco, Texas. He changed his name to David Koresh and claimed to be a messiah of sorts. He advocated polygamy for himself and a few select others, claiming any of the wives in the compound as his own. There were well-founded allegations of child abuse. The cult was stockpiling weapons and withdrawing from the outside world. Why would people follow such a man into such a situation? Koresh claimed to know God's will and promised to help God's kingdom come. How did he do? More than 80 dead men, women, children, and federal agents later, God's kingdom had not come, and His will had most definitely not been done.

Why so much talk about David Koresh? He chose the names of two men God had used in colossal ways to accomplish His will. He named himself David after King David and Koresh is a transliteration of the Hebrew name Cyrus. Unfortunately, Koresh lacked the patient faith of David, who spent years in hiding as Saul hunted him like a dog, all the while trusting that God would keep His promise to make him king, several times passing up the opportunity to help God's promise along by killing Saul. And while Koresh and Cyrus had one thing in common—they were both unbelievers—they had one important difference: God had not promised to use Koresh.

Cyrus was the king of Persia. He came to the throne in 558BC and fulfilled this prophecy in 530BC. Isaiah wrote around 700BC. You do the math. That means that Isaiah foretold all of this about 170 years before it happened. Isaiah's hearers would have thought, “Cyrus who?” But the Lord knew exactly who Cyrus was and what He would accomplish through him.

What makes this text even more interesting, however, is that Cyrus, is called a messiah. This was a reminder to all those listening that all Israel's history and future centered in the long-promised Messiah. Their kings were anointed to preserve Israel in the faith until the coming of Christ. Cyrus was anointed to restore Israel for the coming of the Christ. These little messiahs were figures of the Messiah, the prophet, priest, and king, who would do what they could not.

Cyrus cast open the seemingly impenetrable gates of Babylon. Some ancient histories claim the Babylonians laughed while Cyrus stood outside the city, confident that no one could penetrate the city's defenses. Regardless of how Cyrus took the city, the fact remains that he took it, although not by his own power. The LORD had *grasped Cyrus' right hand* and the LORD guided his sword. In fact, modern historians believe that Cyrus took the city without a fight that might have wiped out both the Babylonian and Persian forces. The Babylonians didn't trust their leaders and didn't want to die. This would not be the first time in history the LORD had moved a powerful enemy to surrender without a fight.

Cyrus cast open the gates of Babylon, which was amazing, but nowhere near as amazing as the opening our ultimate Messiah did. Christ, for whom the pagan Cyrus prepared the way, cast

open the gates of hell and the grave. He vanquished the devil and death itself, and He did so by winning the most horrific battle of all time. As impenetrable as the gates of Babylon may have seemed, no gates ever were more impenetrable than the gates of hell and the grave. No one escaped hell or the grave. The damned stayed damned and the dead stayed dead, but Christ descended to Hell to proclaim His victory and lived to walk out of His tomb and back into the lives of His frightened flock. God's kingdom came and His will was done through Cyrus unwittingly, but there was nothing unwitting about Christ's work. Agonizing in Gethsemane He prayed, *"Thy will be done,"* knowing all too well what was to come. With His dying breath that He proclaimed, *"Thy kingdom come,"* feeling its price in every joint as He cried, *"It is finished."*

There are three important lessons for us today. First, God's kingdom is in God's hands. There are two people mentioned in the Creed: the Virgin Mary and Pontius Pilate, a pagan. In Mary's case, the Lord told her His plan and she agreed to it in childlike faith. In Pilate's case, the Lord simply used him without his knowledge or approval. God's kingdom is in God's hands and He will accomplish His will as He knows best how, sometimes with our knowledge and approval, oftentimes without it. We are simply left to do His will when it has been revealed in His Word and to trust with childlike faith when it has not revealed to us.

Second, God works all things for the good of His people. This is hard to believe during budget crises, on hospital beds, or in broken homes, but it is true. Israel was in exile in Babylon, one of the most despicable, cruel, and intolerable superpowers of all time. It made the Soviet Union look like the Epcot Center. Read the Psalms in the early forties, which the Israelites likely prayed with special fervor in Babylon, and feel the sorrow of a people in exile as they long for their Promised Land and the Temple, as they are forced to sing their holy songs for the entertainment of their captors. Yet blessed are they who mourn, for they will receive comfort. God turned Israel's mourning to joy. Through the work of a pagan, He reestablished their kingdom and accomplished His will. He returned them to the land of promise where His Promise would be kept in the womb of an Israelite virgin, in a manger in Bethlehem, and on a tree outside Jerusalem. Sometimes we cannot see the light of God's wisdom shining behind His inscrutable plans, but just because we can't something doesn't mean it isn't there.

Finally, God keeps His promises. When God promises something, it is as good as done, even though it may seem undoable, even though we may not know His timetable. David wasn't Koresh and neither are we. The LORD alone calls His Cyruses and the LORD alone knows how He will use them. Hindsight is 20/20, and we can rejoice in retrospect as we see the marvelous way in which the LORD kept His promises to Israel. But let us do more than rejoice. Let us trust. Let us trust that the best and greatest Cyrus, the Messiah Jesus Christ, who has opened the gates of hell and the grave through His own suffering and death, will do everything necessary to preserve us whom He has bought with His blood until He comes again. And He will.

*"Thy kingdom come." "Thy will be done."* This is the prayer our Lord has given us. This is God's plan. He doesn't give us the details, and He doesn't give us a timetable, but He does give us His Word, and what more could we ask for than that. No, that is all we need. The Verse of the Day from last Sunday sums it up well. *"Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation"* (Isaiah 25:9). Amen.