

10TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JULY 28, 2013

LOYALTY IN TERROR OR LOYALTY IN LOVE?

Pastor Jim Dunn

Luke 11:1-13

The Lord's Prayer

11 Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." **2** And he said to them, "When you pray, say:

"Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.

3 Give us each day our daily bread, **4** and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation."

5 And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, **6** for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; **7** and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? **8** I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. **9** And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. **10** For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. **11** What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; **12** or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? **13** If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

They were feasts of fresh asparagus — laced with terror. That's the confession of Margot Woelk. Woelk was in her mid-twenties when she was drafted into civilian service and assigned as a food taster and kitchen bookkeeper at Adolph Hitler's Wolf's Lair complex. "Hitler was a vegetarian," she explained in a recent interview. "He never ate any meat during the entire time I was there. Hitler was so paranoid that the British would poison him — that's why he had 15 girls taste the food before he ate it himself. The food was delicious, only the best vegetables, asparagus, bell peppers, everything you can imagine. And always with a side of rice or pasta," she recalled. "But this constant fear — we knew of all those poisoning rumors and could never enjoy the food. Every day we feared it was going to be our last meal." Such fears were justified.

On July 20, 1944, a trusted colonel detonated a bomb in the Wolf's Lair in an attempt to kill Hitler. Hitler survived, but he had nearly 5,000 people executed following the assassination attempt. Those were the kinds of conditions under which Margot Woelk worked for Hitler. Her loyal service to him was done out of terror.

But a higher loyalty, a loyalty out of love is what you have experienced. That is a loyalty to your spouse, a loyalty to your children, a loyalty to friends and others whom you respect, a loyalty to your favorite team or favorite player or favorite musician, a loyalty to your country.

Yet, an even higher loyalty was what some were accused of in Hitler's Germany. It led to genocide. But throughout their long history and throughout our own brief one, the highest loyalty has been reserved for what is called in Hebrew *Immanuel*, "God with us."

Through its bitter history, of foreign occupations and exiles, pogroms and attempts at annihilating the Jewish people, Israel held to the belief that God was with them — that although evil had entered God's creation to usurp God's reign, God had a plan. God promised that on the Last Day, the so-called Day of the Lord, God Himself would come down and put everything back to the way He had made it. God had come down once and been present with Israel at Mount Sinai, where He made a covenant with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The longing cry of Israel's prophets was for God to come down again to His creation, to keep that promise, to restore His gracious reign as king not only over Israel but over all the earth, to establish justice, to put an end to evil and all of the devil's handiwork, to come down as He did at Sinai in the days of Moses and the burning bush and the thunder at Sinai: "Oh that You would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at Your presence, as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil, to make Your name known to Your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at Your presence!" (Isaiah 64:1-2)

Final salvation meant God would come down. It did not consist of people going up, one at a time to heaven, to escape this "vale of tears." God would come down as king to reign.

And then He did come down. The heavens were rent. A great host of angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest!" Some Magi came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?" When they found the child they bowed down and worshiped Him. They displayed their loyalty to the rightful king. In many stories about kings and queens, there is a usurper or pretender to the throne, who tries to take power, either when the king is away on business or when the king has been thrown in the dungeon, or when the king places the lives of his subjects above his own. In the 1956-attempted coup against King Hussein of Jordan, there is one version that says the king offered his own life to end the coup and prevent the country from entering a bloody civil war. That is what God, who is with us, did. So, when He came down He displayed His authority as the rightful king. He proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven stood near. He preached the good news of the kingdom. And the return of God's reign on earth as king began. The reign of the usurper Satan was pushed back as the truth was taught, the sick were healed, the hungry were fed, demons were cast out and the dead were raised!! Even nature was brought to heel. Storms were calmed, winds and seas, and His loyal subjects were taught to pray, "Your kingdom come" Your name be hallowed once again on earth, as it is in heaven. Your kingdom, your reign once again be on earth, as it is in heaven. Your will be done once again on earth, as it is in heaven. Spread the reign of God, the Lord.

So with those very words, we His loyal subjects, pray: Thy kingdom come. And God uses us to fulfill the very thing for which we pray. We teach the truth about Jesus, Immanuel... the God with us, the king who offered his own life to save us from sin and to make death not the end. We seek the healing of the sick and the prevention of sickness. We seek to feed the hungry. That all may bow the knee to the rightful king, out of love for the king.

But do we seek it for every person or just for Americans or just for those who are like us or just for those we think are more likely to be reached? Who already look like us and think like us and live like us? I have to confess I shudder at how overwhelming is the task in our neighborhood alone. There's a rap artist named Janelle Monae, who's from Kansas City, Kansas who says she's trying to save Kansas City. I don't know, saving Manheim Park seems terrifying enough. It is a fearful thing to think about trying to spread the reign of Jesus to every person in Manheim Park regardless of who they are: drug addict, prostitute. And what does terror about this work have to do with being loyal to God out of love? Nothing. Terror only gets in our way.

But thanks be to God, The One to whom we are loyal is the God with us. *Immanuel!!!*

God is with us not merely for the sake of making us feel better. He is with us for the sake of bringing His reign to others. He promised that He is with us always in Matthew 28:20, because in the previous verse He tells us to go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

The very reason He is with us is to spread His reign. After all, it's still His work. The reign of God is God's action through Jesus and through us to put the world back to the way that He made it, to overthrow sin and evil and the devil and death completely. And in one respect that's already been done. The Last Day, the Day of the Lord, has already happened in Jesus.

Just like that bomb going off in the Wolf's Lair should have told Margot Woelk that the days of Hitler's reign of terror were numbered. So Jesus' death and resurrection told evil, injustice, sin, and death that their days are numbered. Sin and evil are overthrown.

Jesus received in His body God's end-time judgment against sin. And death is overthrown. Death's power to end life was overthrown when the rightful king rose from death. So, terror is replaced with hope, loyal subjects of Immanuel, that God will use us to help others bow the knee out of love. God's work will go on. The truth of Jesus will be taught to the end of the age, when God will come down one last time and complete His reign over this earth.

Amen