**Island Bay Presbyterian Church, Wellington, New Zealand**

**Sermon: Gateway 3 March 4th 2018**

**Psalm 46 / Galatians 6:1-5**

So, we continue our series on Gateways to the Kingdom.

When Jesus was around and preaching there were a bunch of guys hanging around called the Romans. The Romans had an ***Emperor***, an ***Empire***, and the most efficient ***army*** the world had ever seen. And they used that army to keep conquering other countries so that they could keep expanding their Empire and the prestige of their Emperor.

One of the places the Romans had conquered was Palestine, the country where Jesus lived. And when the Romans conquered a place *they tried to make it like them*; they tried to impose the will of the Emperoron that place.

They introduced Roman education; they introduced Roman culture (including baths, which was actually a good thing!); they forced people to worship Roman gods including the Emperor whom they claimed was a god; they drafted the locals into their army, and they made people use Roman coins, a lot of which they had to pay *back* to the Romans as tax.

So, with this background, when Jesus went around preaching, he kept referring to this thing called **the Kingdom of God** – “the Kingdom of God is at hand! The Kingdom of God is among you! Seek ye first the Kingdom of God!”

And this Kingdom of God thing was pretty much inspired by the Roman Empire, which is ***surprising,*** because everyone hated the Romans for the way they imposed themselves everywhere they went.

But, as well as being surprising it was also very ***clever*** because Jesus could then contrast God’s Kingdom with the Roman Empire as a kind of anti-kingdom, as a different kind of a kingdom, a better Kingdom., thereby showing how *God’s* will was different from the *Emperor’s* will.

And so in God’s Kingdom, in the places where *God’s* will is being done instead of the Emperor’s will, we see peace rather than armies and violence.

- We see people loving and forgiving their enemies, not trying to kill them or enslave them.

- We see justice and righteousness where the first are last and the last are first, not oppression and sin and those who already have lots taking more at the expense of the poor.

- We see people looking out for each other and bearing one another’s burdens, not competing with each other and looking out only for themselves.

- We see a community of diversity, the Body of Christ with its many members all with different gifts and talents to bring to the mix – not a place of conformity.

- And we see a community of welcome where everyone has a place at the table, not a community that separates itself by race and class and occupation.

Unfortunately the world around us is still a place of Empires and Emperors, not the Kingdom of God.

I *do* believe that Jesus has transformed society a lot though. I do believe that society is a lot more compassionate and just and inclusive than it used to be, and that this stems from the teachings of Jesus slowly impacting the world over the last 2,000 years. However, there is still a long way to go! The Kingdom has by no means come in its fullness in the world around us, not by a long shot.

And so, followers of Jesus are called to come together in community to live out the values of God’s Kingdom - as a witness to how the world can be different, and as a witness to what the world will be like when the Kingdom *finally* comes in all its fullness at the end of time…

For, the ways of God’s Kingdom are different to the ways of the world, and it can be hard to be different! What makes it harder stillis that we are surrounded by the values of the Empire 24/7 – whereas Christians primarily set aside this one-two hours of Church a week to be reminded of the values of the Kingdom.

*And is that enough?*

Last week we read Romans 12 where it calls on us not to be ***conformed*** to the ways of the world, but rather to be ***transformed*** by the renewing of our minds! And is one hour a week of being exposed to Kingdom values enough to transform our minds?

No it is not - we need to do other stuff during the week as well.

Things like reading our Bible, reading other Christian websites and books, listening to Christian music and podcasts, meeting with other believers to study our faith and pray for each other, spending time alone with God etc…

And so we are calling this series ‘Gateways to the Kingdom’ because these values are *open* to us but can be hard for us to adopt. They can be *obstacles* for us on the road of following Jesus.

- Gateway 1 was **revelation** which leads into the Kingdom in the first place. This is the beginning of the journey with Jesus and was a reminder that we can only enter the Kingdom if God draws us, or if Jesus reveals himself to us.

God’s self-revelation is the gateway to the Kingdom, but in revealing Him or Herself, God usually partners with people like us in helping people sit with and process these revelations.

- Gateway 2 was **commitment** which leads us into community. This was a reminder that God is a community, 3-in-1, and that God calls us into community. God’s Kingdom usually comes within community, and being part of a community requires commitment and investment in its common life.

- Today is gateway 3 which is **submission**…

Submission is a word that can be abused, and so the attitude of submission needs to be held alongside the action that it is supposed to lead to in the Kingdom, which is the action of *mutual service*.

Submission and service.

I read a great quote a while back which stereotyped men. Being a stereotype means of course that it isn’t always true, and that it can in fact also apply to women! But I think it speaks to how submission doesn’t come naturally to our culture.

The quote was this: that men tend to spend much of their lives up to the age of 50 sacrificing their health to make lots and lots of money, but how after they turn 50 they then tend to sacrifice much of that money to try and regain their health.

It’s only a stereotype, but does it speak a truth about our culture? We’re busy! We’re active! We have to get ahead and be in charge, be strong and in control. In contrast to this we have the Word of God calling us from Psalm 46 which we opened the service with to “***be still and know that I am God***.”

Be still and know that I am God! Relax, let go, have faith, and submit - submit to a will which is greater than yours, and which desires the best for you…

We’ve had two readings today with two key and well-known verses in them:

1) ‘Be still and know that I am God’ is the first one, from Psalm 46,

2) and the other was from Ephesians 6:2 - “***Bear one another’s’ burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ***”

**Psalm 46** speaks of submitting to *God*.

Of pausing, making space, giving up on our striving and need for control, and allowing God to enter us and heal us and transform us with the Light.

In stilling ourselves and allowing ourselves to open up to the reality and authority of God, we are taking a step of faith. Because if God is allowed to actually *be God* in our lives (rather than *us* trying to be God), who knows what God will do? Who knows what God will say to us? Who knows where God will lead us???

But based on the example of Jesus, God will probably lead us into a life characterised by acts of compassion and service…

Be still and know that I am God!

Have faith in God’s loving kindness, and trust that although there may be some challenges in where God takes us, that it is for our best, and that it will lead us to a place of grace…

**Ephesians 6** speaks of submission too.

It also speaks of submitting to God in that it shows us *the way to fulfil the law of Christ*. But it’s saying that the law of Christ is fulfilled by submitting to each other, by submitting to the Body of Christ.

- We are to bear one another’s burdens; we are to help each other out in the hard times on the journey of life. Because hard times can and will come, and we are called to keep our hearts open to each other in love, and our eyes open to each other in discernment.

- We are called to submit to each other by looking out for each other, and by not holding back in sharing the load when our brothers and sisters need a hand.

- We are called to serve each other as Jesus came to serve us, and in this way we are submitting to God and obeying the law of Christ.

So, two verses:

One calling us to submit to God directly by stilling ourselves before God, and allowing God to be God in our lives.

And one telling us to submit to God by obeying the law of Christ, a law that is fulfilled *by submitting ourselves to each other* and bearing one another’s burdens.

You will note that we are not called to submit to the institution of the Church so as to increase its wealth and power – that is the way of the Empire, not the way of God’s Kingdom. Neither are we called on to submit to a pastor or priest or guru so as to increase their prestige and acclaim – that is the way of the Emperor, and not of Christ.

Instead, we are called on to 1) submit to God directly, and 2) to submit to each other in loving service and mutual support. That is Gateway 3 of the Kingdom, the gateway of submission.

How does that speak into our lives? Let’s all take a moment to pause and reflect on these words.