

Force Matthew 11:12–19 Reformation Day Oct. 25, 2020

From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Matthew 11:12-15 Force

Brothers and sisters in Christ, to we remember the reformation, begun when Martin Luther posted the 95 Theses. There were problems in Martin Luther's day. The pope and his bishops saw the kingdom of God as a bank, where Christ (and the saints) deposited their righteousness and the pope and the church would give it out, through sacramental rites and, when they saw fit, through indulgences. One guesses that this system was invented because the pope cared a lot about banking - and money - he needed a lot of financing to build St. Peter's. When all you need is financing, everything, even the kingdom of God, looks like a bank. So indulgences and church titles, as a stand-in for grace, were sold; the church sold the gifts Christ gives. Instead of Christ on the cross being preached so people could believe, he was used to sell paper and titles. Some opposed this sale; but they thought reform would mostly be better people who weren't so crass in their greed. With a scripture written in Latin that even many priests could not understand, there was no one to oppose this abuse of God's kingdom. No one until God used Luther to expound and translate scripture, to put it forth not just in name but for use as the actual word of God. And in that word Christ died for the many, that they too would enter the kingdom of God.

The word was preached again. But this was not a clear earthly triumph. Men still wanted the kingdom their way, and opposed Luther, and opposed God. Their figurative violence to the word, when they preached the gospel of the bank, became a literal violence. The word suffered violence as forceful men opposed its preaching. Wars were fought; men and women were killed as men tried to force a different message than Christ upon the church. Yet the bible was translated and God's word was heard and still abides.

It wasn't so different in Christ's day. God had called the people to repent through his word to the prophets, even John the baptist. One group, the Sadducees, led by the chief priests, barely believed in God and certainly in no supernatural acts but they understood how lucrative the temple system was. They could sell the gifts they had, even the temple sacrifices, and make a nice profit, one they could see and touch. Another group, reformers, the Pharisees, thought that stricter adherence to God's law would bring God's kingdom - and adherence they were set to lead. Both looked to God's word given through Jesus and prophets like John the baptist not as a call to repent, but for support for their position and influence. And when God's word didn't follow their dictates, they turned against its messengers. They were unlike Joshua. Joshua, when confronted by the commander of the army of the Lord outside Jericho, who was neither for him nor his enemies, fell on his face and humbled himself before God. They denied and killed those the Lord sent. They tried to force their way in, to substitute their word for God's. Yet God is present in his word; though the prophets died and Jesus was killed, Christ rose and God's word remained.

Did any of you have trouble singing when we were meeting remotely? I found when listening to YouTube that if I sang too loudly, I could not hear the music and I wandered from the tune

and the beat. It is good to have the tune louder than I can sing; it keeps me on track. Maybe you have the same problem staying on track. But it isn't just with music, where being off track isn't so bad. It is far worse when God speaks. How much worse when the chief priests and the Pharisees, went off track when their own voices drowned out God's word. What depravity and baseness and evil was promoted when the pope and even his humanist reformers preferred their voices to God's word.

But it isn't just those two instance. Ever since Adam and Eve in the garden, we've been helping God out by adding our words to make his kingdom better. God might have said do not eat of the tree in the center, but it was pleasing to the eye, good for food, and made one wise. Surely if He had understood, God would want us to eat of it; they would expand God's kingdom. And when Adam and Eve helped God out - they ate and sin entered the world.

How often we do the same. And we can point at other people, who ignore God's word and say that peace, that God's kingdom, is about acceptance of sin, about tearing down structures because they represent something bad. This may be true, but the law points back at us. We force the kingdom of God to be saying the right slogans dressing right and sharing the right opinions. We shout so loud on the internet and in our campaigns that God's word cannot be heard. Don't take this wrong. God's word does speak on the matters of the day, but the matters of the day are not the kingdom. In face, Christ says clearly do not worry about what you drink or what you wear, but seek the kingdom. With John the baptist, Christ says repent of making other things the kingdom. Christ shows there is no other victory for us when he defeats even death for us; he show us how right God is to say you shall have no other Gods. When we force our views to be entry in the kingdom, we deny Christ as the true entrance.

So hear God's word today. Let no one force other views on the kingdom. Do not be lead from God's word of Christ and his kingdom. Even more, do not let yourself force your views into the kingdom. There is a savior, you are not him. Listen to God's word that he may live in you.