With the state of the economy and the constant bickering between politicians, you sometimes have to wonder who is really in control of our country. Does it seem at times that no one is really in control? One of the assurances that we have in such difficult times is that God is ultimately in control of all things. Indeed, speaking of Christ’s resurrection, Paul tells us in Ephesians 1 that God raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.

God’s control over all things extends to all the governments and authorities on earth, as Paul tells us in Romans 13: Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Taking God at his Word means that he established every government on earth - the good and the bad. Perhaps we think we can clearly see why God established good governments on earth, but why the bad? If a government turns out to be evil, would we suggest that God did not establish it? For if God had no hand in the governments that turn evil, then how could he be said to be in control of all things? God is not evil but he can cause evil to serve his good purpose, as Paul tells us in Romans 8:28: And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

In the reading for today from Isaiah 45, God proclaims: I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no god. God wants those who believe in him to take him at his Word about who he is. God is hidden and we cannot see him. For us to know him he has to reveal himself to us. He does this in the Holy Scriptures through his prophets. God wants you to know and believe that he is the only God and there is no other. That means that God, who reveals himself to us as our Triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is the one true God. God wants you to have the courage of conviction to believe this for yourself and all others.

This means that we cannot hold to any concept of God being anything but the Triune God. So, it is sinful to agree that God is a different God to some. We cannot say that the gods of the Hindu, Muslim, or even Jew are truly God, for the Lord says he alone is God and there is no other.

Remember that the name LORD in all capital letters reminds us that God is Yahweh, the God of grace and promise. So as we believe in the one true God, Yahweh, we have the confidence of being able to believe all he says to us. We do not have to fear what may come because God has promised that ultimately every believer will be with him in heaven for all eternity. Then we can believe that the one true God rules over all history for the good of his Church.
Understand that in saying God rules all things for the good of his Church, we are not talking about a particular denomination, but about Church as the gathering of all who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The reading for today shows God ruling and acting in history to control the rise and fall of nations for the good of his Church.

A little history is needed to understand and appreciate the reading for today. God called the nation of Israel to be his chosen people, telling them that if they obeyed all he commanded, they would be for him a treasured possession, a holy nation, belonging to him. But the people of Israel never met the condition of obedience and God had no obligation to keep Israel as his chosen nation.

Because of sin and rebellion by Israel, after Solomon died in 931 BC, God separated the nation of Israel into two nations - into the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. Over the next 200 years the two kingdoms rebelled against God and repeatedly fell into idol worship by adopting pagan gods. God sent prophet after prophet to warn the Israelites to repent and return to him or suffer God’s wrath.

One of those prophets was Isaiah who served from about 740 BC to 680 BC. Part of Isaiah’s work was to prophesy to the Northern Kingdom that if the people did not repent, God would send the wicked nation of Assyria against her and she would be utterly destroyed. The Northern Kingdom did not listen to the prophets and in 722 BC Assyria conquered the North and deported most of the people to parts unknown, never to return. The Northern Kingdom would never be revived.

Eventually, Isaiah turned his attention to the Southern Kingdom, also called Judah. Although Judah also had fallen into idol worship, the Lord did not destroy her. God treated Judah differently because God had made an unconditional promise that the Messiah, Jesus, would come from the tribe of Judah and to keep his promise, Judah had to stay intact. Yet, God would not ignore her rebellion and apostasy or falling away. So God spoke through Isaiah telling the people of Judah that if they did not repent, they would be conquered by a different nation, Babylon. Instead of being deported, never to return, the people of Israel would be deported for 70 years, and then God would allow them to return to Jerusalem.

In the reading for today, God speaks about the king who would allow Judah to return from the exile. Isaiah tells us: This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who summons you by name. For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, tho you do not acknowledge me.

Cyrus was the king of the Persian and Medes who conquered Babylon at God’s command. Although God calls Cyrus his anointed, as far as we know, Cyrus was not a believer in the Lord. God anointed Cyrus for God’s good purposes to be a powerful leader of a new world empire that would conquer other nations. God tells us he did this for the sake of his servant Jacob, a name for Israel. God used Cyrus to conquer wicked Babylon and allow God’s people to return from exile to the Promised Land.

So it was God who established the nation of Israel. It was God who split the nation into two nations. It was God who raised up Assyria and sent her to conquer and destroy the Northern Kingdom. It was God who raised up Babylon as a nation and sent her to conquer
and deport Judah for 70 years. In this reading, we see it was God who would raise up the next world empire, the Persians and Medes, who would conquer Babylon and whose king, Cyrus, would allow the Judeans to return home.

The amazing part of this prophecy concerning Cyrus is that God prophesied about him 200 years before he was born. Understand that at the time of Isaiah’s writing, the Northern Kingdom was still intact. Babylon was not much of a nation and Assyria was the world empire and had been for a long time.

So Isaiah prophesied about the next world empire to come, Babylon, about the following empire the Persians and Medes and named the king who would lead them. Many say that this reading could not have been written by Isaiah because it was way too accurate and they say no one can see into the future, not even God.

But if God could not see into the future, then there is no such thing as prophecy. God could not have promised the Savior to Adam and Eve nor could he have promised who the Savior would be, what nation he would come from, what tribe, where and when he would be born and what he would do to save us. In all this we see God ruling all history for the good of his Church, so that all could be assured that Jesus is Lord and Savior.

God’s primary purpose in his rule is that all might know the Lord is God, because God wants all to come to the knowledge of truth and be saved. In this reading, God said to Cyrus: I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no god. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting men may know there is none besides me. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things.

Although we know that God acted in history with the Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians and Medes, we cannot know how God is acting in history today. We cannot answer why God allowed WWII with all its evil, all we can say is all along he was in control ruling for the good of his Church. At times it is hard to see God’s hand in his rule of all nations. Yet the comfort we have is to know that God is still in heaven upon his throne ruling over all things, the rise and fall of nations and economies, all for the good of his Church, that all might know he is the one true God.

God wants all to know him as the one true God because he wants all men to be saved. There is no salvation, for as God, speaking about the crucified and risen Savior, tells us through Peter in Acts 4: Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

The only way for the world to know he is the one true Savior, is for us, his servants, to share the Gospel message with all. What better time to do this, than in times of woe, for then the hard hearts of many are softened to listen to God and his promises. Then they will know the Lord is in control over all things; he rules for he is God and there is no other; he rules all history for the good of his Church; that all may know there’s no other Savior!

Amen.

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