

Thy Kingdom Come
August 3rd, 2014

Matthew 6:10a
Pentecost 8 A

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“This, then, is how you should pray...” As we step back into our look at the Lord’s prayer, let’s remind ourselves that this is not just the perfect prayer Jesus gave us to use whenever the situation seems to call for it. These aren’t just words we should repeat *ad nauseum* whenever we can. It’s more than just one prayer to pray. It’s meant to be a model for our future prayers, a pattern of *how* to pray when we approach God. “Here,” says Jesus, “is how you should address God...as your Father. And here are the things for which you ought to ask God...the kind of petitions or requests you ought to make.”

That’s important to remember for our entire prayer life, because often we either just don’t know what to pray for, or we fail spectacularly at following Jesus’ example here. When the worst parts of us take hold what do our prayers look like? Maybe we would begin by asking our Father for good health for ourselves and our loved ones. After all, it’s hard to enjoy anything if you don’t have your health. Then we might move on to the wealth thing if we didn’t start there, maybe not billions, but enough to be very comfortable and never have to worry about money again. We could ask for fame, success, movie-star looks, intellectual brilliance. We would ask for just all-around happiness. And by that point why don’t we just wrap it up with something like: “For *mine* is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever?”

Jesus’ prayer is infinitely better. Here Jesus lifts our eyes from our love affair with ourselves and he points them to the God who has loved us more than we could ever properly love ourselves. The first three petitions, the first three things about which Jesus asks us to pray, center not on us at all, but on God – His name, His kingdom, His will. These are the things that matter. The longer we spend in the company of Jesus, the more understand just how right this is. These are the things that matter! Jesus said so: **“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteous-ness, and all these other things shall be given to you as well.”** (Mt 6:33).

And let’s just glance back two weeks quickly and remember that the address we start this prayer with is what matters most and what makes the rest of the prayer even possible. That we call God Our Father. This honor and privilege is ours only because of the one who taught us to this prayer, Jesus. Because he did for us, he died for us and he rose as our guarantee. All of which becomes ours by faith created by the Holy Spirit. Trusting that we are redeemed by Jesus blood, you and I come boldly and joyfully before God as dear children ask their dear Father.

Then, as we learned last week, we make our first request: **“Hallowed be thy name.”** We want God’s name, his reputation to be honored as holy. God’s true reputation is found in the Bible so when we teach and live according to the Bible, God’s name is hallowed, honored as holy. And remember that is not accomplished by us trying harder to make it so, but rather by drawing closer and closer to his name in his Word.

And then we pray: **“Thy kingdom come.”** This is perhaps the petition we forget the easiest. The entire concept of what the “kingdom of God” is we regularly forget or just don’t think about when we hear it. It’s the easiest to misunderstand. Shortly after Jesus started his earthly ministry he proclaimed to those Jewish crowds that the kingdom of God was near. And what did they think? That phrase brought to mind bright banners, huge armies, the gold and ivory of Solomon’s day and the nation of Israel as king of the hill once more. There were the zealots who stood, armed and ready at the edge of Jesus’ audience, they would have eagerly rallied around a militant Jewish king. But much to their dismay, the signal for revolt never came. The one time they did try to crown him king, he mysteriously withdrew. And when Peter finally drew a sword in defense of his Lord, Jesus rebuked him and healed the victim’s wounds.

The phrase “the kingdom of heaven” is used some 32 times in Matthew’s Gospel alone. And yet, to the disappointment of most who heard it at the time, it became clear that Christ was talking about a different kind of kingdom. The Jews wanted to go back to the glory days of King David. But Jesus wasn’t really interested in making the governments of the day into Christian governments. He didn’t tell the religious oppressed to rise up and set up their own nation. Hopefully you haven’t failed to notice but no political power in our world has managed to make the kingdom of God arrive by any governmental or political means. The greatest ancient empires of old – Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome – the kings, queens, dictators and tyrants of every age – they’re all gone now. They’re all dust. Christ remains.

Much like every problem that Christ encountered in his time, it shouldn’t surprise us that infatuation with worldly kingdoms is still around in those who are trying to be religious. The word “kingdom” is used and abused by today’s “church growth” strategists who have infected the modern mega churches – CEO like managers who think to grow the church in the same way they would grow any business. Their tools are worldly – not spiritual.

Kingdom growth is not the same as what some call “church growth.” Now, the visible ranks of the church may at times be packed full with people who really are true believers. Great! Who of us wouldn’t want that? But at other

times, the visible church has a bloated membership roster of mere hangers-on. And when church discipline is enforced or the kind of persecution that separates wheat from chaff, those colors show. Our tri-parish has nearly 150 members on paper. It may be painful to admit, but if a couple dozen of those were removed tomorrow, it probably wouldn't change our average attendance at all. The coming of the kingdom isn't something you can chart on a graph or track with statistics. And it's not something you can bring to pass through nicer facilities, larger parking lots or organizational skills – nice as all of these things may be. Every few years, some well-intentioned soul somewhere comes up with another clever fad that will pack 'em in, as they say. And it may work. But if this gimmick is all that they are there for, what happens when, as everything earthly does, the thrill of the new wears off? At times it seems that although we claim to believe the power of this Book and this Gospel, instead we chase after the world's candy rather than the Bread of heaven.

To understand this properly, what it means for God's kingdom to come, we turn to our Lord himself who explained it in this way: **"The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."** (Lk 17:20-21). The kingdom of God isn't a place or a group of people in a specific location. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of hearts – where the Holy Spirit changes hearts and makes Christ king of souls one at a time.

Jesus' kingdom is a kingdom of separate souls who believe in him alone for salvation. Together they make up the invisible, holy, Christian Church. How God's kingdom comes is as simple as what we learned in Luther's Catechism under the petition: "Thy kingdom come." *"How does God's kingdom come? God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives his Holy Spirit so that by his grace we believe his holy word and lead a godly life now on earth and forever in heaven."* Wherever the Holy Spirit comes into a dead heart full of sin and shines the light of God's love there, warming the heart and bringing it to life that will last forever with God – there the kingdom of God has come.

"Thy kingdom come." The flipside of this petition of "Thy kingdom come" is *"my kingdom gone."* I am asking God to set up shop in my heart and call the shots in my life, to move me with the pure influences of the Gospel, to take charge of my inner-most thoughts and motives. And that means removing all the selfish desires of setting up my own kingdom here. I am here praying for all pastors, for all teachers of God's word, for all missionaries who take the everlasting Good News of Jesus to dangerous and inconvenient places – so that God's kingdom may come into the hearts of others too. This Gospel of Christ crucified conquers and occupies one heart at a time...every time the Holy Spirit flips on the light in some dark soul through the Gospel, wherever we spread the seed by faith, we are creating the opportunity for God's kingdom to come.

Have we forgotten how easily the little castles of our personal comfort zones can collapse, how the life we planned and built may not be the life God has mapped out for us? We need to remember – that when the bank accounts and homes are gone, when the people closest to us let us down, when the deadbolt locks on our homes, the ambulances and hospitals, the police department, the military and the phone lines all fail us, when all the kingdoms we have built become landfills or craters – when even our own bodies turn on us day by day – that there is a kingdom – a kingdom that cannot be touched by the hand of earthly rulers or tragedy or even death itself. And there is a King who has been there from eternity on the other side – a King who has come to our alien shores to establish a kingdom that will never collapse, never be taken from us.

"Thy kingdom come." Christ's kingdom comes when a dying thief says, **"Lord remember me,"** when a soldier at the foot of the cross says, **"Surely this was the Son of God,"** when the suffering and depressed cast themselves into the hands of the Great Physician, when hearts full of guilt find release in his forgiveness, when a child is received by water and the word, when a Sunday School teacher touches the heart of a child with the Gospel, when and Christ with his promises reaches to your weary heart and takes those burdens from you that you can't bear any longer and says, "Here, let me take that for you." In him we find rest for our souls. For where Jesus rules, then even in the saddest and darkest places on earth, his kingdom, which is now our kingdom, remains forever. Amen.