

Your Kingdom Come, Your Will Be Done on Earth

Matthew 6:10; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 12:32; Matthew 13:44-46

How shall we, can we, pray these two petitions: “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven?” Only as we pray the Lord’s prayer with Jesus and as he prays it with us. He’s the one who helps us understand what the kingdom of God is about and what the will of God is. He’s the one who helps free us from the false kingdoms of our lives and helps join our wills with God’s will.

I

The title to my sermon intentionally cuts off the end of the prayer, “as it is in heaven”: Your Kingdom Come, Your Will Be Done on Earth. I titled it so because the emphasis as we pray this verse tends to be on heaven. Heaven can wait. The better translation of the Greek here is “as in heaven, so on earth.”

Some of the confusion about heaven and earth comes because when Matthew speaks of the kingdom of God he most often (31 out of 36 times), says the kingdom of *heaven*, rather than kingdom of God. He did so out of reverence for the Name of God, but it’s caused a lot of us to think of the kingdom of God as heaven only. But Jesus asks us to pray for heaven’s coming to earth.

There are wrong ways to think of it. For 2,000 years the church, to further its own goals, has made an unholy alliance with the State.

A vivid example today is the extremist Christian agenda that is shaping our current politics. It's called Seven Mountain Dominionism and its goal is to conquer and control the seven main arenas of our society. Listen to the list:

Family, check!

Religion, check!

Education, check!

Media, check!

Arts and entertainment, check!

Government, check!

Business, check!

It is key to Project 2025, which is driving the agenda of the party currently in power.

In the wilderness the devil tempted Jesus with a crown. The devil took Jesus to a high mountain where they could see all the kingdoms of the world, and the devil said, "This is yours, if you but worship me." Jesus refused the crown

offered him in the wilderness, but too many Christians today are eager to take it up. They want to rule, but Jesus calls us to serve.

You can't sincerely pray, "Thy kingdom come" if you have your kingdom in mind. And you can't work for the kingdom with tactics opposed to the way of Jesus, that is by violence and domination. As we collaborate with God in the coming of God's kingdom we do so with the values of the kingdom: love, joy, peace, non-violence and mercy.

So here is where we begin: God means the kingdom for *earth*, but not through any means, but by God's means.

II

So now we move to the meaning of the kingdom Jesus preached. Mark's gospel launches Jesus' ministry with these words:

Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news [or gospel] of God and saying "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news."

That was the main theme of his preaching: the kingdom of God. When I was growing up in Southern Baptist Land we talked hardly at all about the kingdom of God. We talked about "eternal life", which was the main way John's gospel talked about salvation. And this "eternal life" was always about heaven, getting into

heaven. And, you know, escaping hell. But the Greek word Jesus used was *zoe*, like the name, and it means true life, abundant life, and it could happen here, now!

So what was the kingdom of God kind of life that Jesus preached was coming to us now, and Jesus taught us to pray for?

It was the kingdom of *God*, and not our kinds of kingdoms. Jesus most often taught about the kingdom in parables that helped us imagine what the kingdom of God was like and how it might be for us to enter it. And to let it enter us!

The kingdom is like, is like, is like...a great feast where everyone is invited, like a father welcoming home a lost son and a lost son coming home, like a business where all are paid the same no matter how long you've worked.

It's like a tiny mustard seed growing into a great bush where animals and birds come to feed.

And it's so good we are willing to risk something big for something good. It's the treasure buried in our back yard. And when you find it, you go *in your joy* and sell all you have to own. The kingdom of God is joy too! The kingdom is like a pearl of great price you've been looking for all your life, and when you find it, you cash in all the other pearls you've found to buy it.

The kingdom of God is joy and justice, compassion, healing and peace. It turns the world you know upside down, if you let it. It can heal you too. There's a poem about the kingdom of God I love written by R.S. Thomas, acknowledged as one of the greatest British poets of our time, a minister who spent most of his career in poor, windblown, out of the way churches. He captures the essence of the kingdom in these words:

The Kingdom

It's a long way off but inside it
There are quite different things going on:
Festivals at which the poor man
Is king and the consumptive is
Healed; mirrors in which the blind look
At themselves and love looks at them
Back; and industry is for mending
The bent bones and the minds fractured
By life. It's a long way off, but to get
There takes no time and admission
Is free, if you purge yourself
Of desire, and present yourself with

Your need only and the simple offering

Of your faith, green as a leaf¹

This vision seems far from the world in which we live, ruled by greed and lust for power where the little ones of this world are discarded and used for target practice. But this is the world that God wants for us, the kingdom God every day is inviting us to enter so we might embody it for the world. Work for it, pray for it, give up things for it, that this world might become God's dream for us. Thy kingdom come on earth as in heaven.

Jesus said it was "at hand." Not "in hand", not yet. He said it has come near, as near as your own breath. He said that it comes sometimes without our noticing it. It is with us, and among us and spread through the earth. Look around and see.

But it is sometimes resisted by the world which operates against its coming. Last week was the 60th anniversary of the Civil Rights March to Selma, when marchers were brutally beaten; one, John Lewis, had his skull cracked open. Children faced snarling police dogs, and some knocked to the streets with fire hoses.

But soon after, in 1964, we passed the Civil Rights Act, and in 1965 the Voting Rights Act. Your kingdom come on earth. But today all of these advances

of the kingdom are being reversed. So it's time, as that same John Lewis, who became a Senator, said before he died to go out and make "some good trouble." The world is not always ready for the kingdom of God. So here we are: the kingdom is always "right now" and "not yet." Why else would we need to pray for it?

Are there other words for the kingdom of God, beyond its monarchical tones? Some call it God's Realm. Clarence Jordan in his Cotton Patch translation of the New Testament calls it God's Movement. Wendell Berry calls it the Great Economy, where everyone and everything belong to each other. Theologian John Cobb, whose work I used last week called it "God's Commonwealth", where the wealth of the land is meant by God to be spread and shared with all who live there. Four of our states began with that dream, calling themselves "Commonwealths."

In terrible contrast, our nation is losing its commitment to what has been called "the common good", to public schools, and public land and even to the public health. The body politic is infected with runaway greed when the wealth of the land is only for a few.

So we pray urgently, earnestly, "Your kingdom come." We have our holy work cut out for us, but we are not alone; for God is *giving us* the kingdom.

There's this lovely verse in Luke when Jesus says to us: "Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Take heart, God is bringing us the kingdom: it's not all up to us.

III

So this verse leads us to the other petition: "Your will be done on earth as in heaven."

There are two words for the will of God in the Greek: the first is used in the words of Jesus I just quoted, a beautiful word, *eudokia*, "good pleasure." It speaks of God's dearest desires for us and the world. God's good pleasure is for our well-being and the well-being of the world. So we start: God's will is for our good. Always.

The second word for God's will is *thelema*, the general word, and like all general words it can be used in many ways, good and bad.

Pope Urban called Christendom to the Crusades to kill the Muslims in the Holy Land with the words *Deus La Volt*: God Wills It. These same words are tattooed on the arm of our Secretary of Defense.

Years ago, Knoxville Tennessee was hosting the World's Fair. A man who owned an apartment building there threw out all the residents so he could rent

the apartments to those coming to the World's Fair. He said he'd prayed about it and it was God's will.

Too often the Will of God is invoked when something terrible has happened, as with the phrase, "Act of God", used in insurance policies to refer to natural disasters. Sometimes we use "Will of God" language to try to cover up anguish and bring some kind of meaning to the hardest thing of life. But that is not how Jesus used it. He said once, when talking about children: "It is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." Not one! (Matthew 18:14).

When William Sloane Coffin was the minister of The Riverside Church in New York City, his young adult son Alex drove his car off a bridge into Boston Harbor and drowned. A few weeks later he addressed the tragedy in a sermon. In it he said he found consolation in the thought that his son's death was NOT the will of God, and he told of the day a couple of days after Alex's death when a woman came in the door of his apartment with an armful of quiches. As she hustled past him she shook her head and said, "I just don't understand the will of God." Coffin flew after her and said, "I'll say you don't, lady!" He said, "I needed the anger and she needed the instruction!" God's hand was not at the wheel that day. And then he said these words which are etched in my memory: "When the

waves covered over the hood of the sinking car, God's heart was the first of all our hearts to break."

When we pray, "Thy will be done", we trust that God's Will is always for our good. When we pray, "Thy will be done", we trust that whatever happens, God is at work for our healing, our peace.

And now to the moment in Jesus' life when he prayed in anguish to be spared what lay ahead the next day, his execution on a Roman cross.

Abba, Abba Father, he prayed...all things are possible to you. Remove this cup!"

Then the words

But not my will, yours be done.

What can we make of this? *Not* that it was God's will that Jesus be killed. But rather something like this: I relinquish my life into your hand. I am your whatever happens!

As Jesus prays this prayer with us we too can offer such a prayer of relinquishment, perhaps the deepest form of faith, not holding on but letting go, relinquishing our lives into better hands than ours.

When we pray “Your kingdom come, your will be done, we do not know what this may mean for us. Poet and Spiritual writer Kathleen Norris says her most important prayers are the ones she doesn’t understand. She prays, “God I *mean* these words, even if I don’t know what they *mean*.”

These prayers are for God’s kingdom, God’s will and God is God is God. And we pray to be part of who God is and what God wants for us and the world. Amen.