



3/15/2020

## “Your Kingdom Come. Your Will Be Done ...”

Scripture: Psalm 8:1-2; Colossians 4:10-12; Matthew 6:10, 12:46-50

Lenten Series: Living the Lord’s Prayer

Third Sunday in Lent

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In chapter 12 of Matthew’s gospel account, we read (Matthew 12:46-50), “While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, ‘Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.’ He replied to him, ‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’ Pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.’”

Today is the third in our sermon series this Lenten season on Living the Lord’s Prayer. Today we focus on seeking and doing God’s will for our world and our lives.

In his book, *Living the Lord’s Prayer – The Way of the Disciple* (IVP, 2009), Albert Haase says that:

† When we pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” we are seeking to promote God’s intention for the world and personally make faith-based decisions.

He asserts that “The kingdom of God can come in the slightest of circumstances. All it takes is an awareness of God’s love for us and the love of others in a manner that is appropriate . . . , surrender to the present, and living joyfully and peacefully.

As we can consider the current circumstances in other countries, and now in our own, related to the Coronavirus or COVID -19 pandemic, we realize that everyone has choices to make. Sometimes those choices are made for us, in the form of restrictions. But at other times, the choice is ours. And those choices can impact the lives of others, even indirectly.

I saw a news story last week of a distraught mother of a girl who has diabetes. She relies upon purchasing supplies like hand-sanitizer on a regular basis. However, it was completely sold out at the store she frequents. As many people have entered a state of mind anywhere from caution and preparedness to panic, some are shopping as though they were expecting doomsday.

The reality is that crisis also presents opportunity: opportunity to focus on ourselves and our own needs, interests and well-being, or on those of others.

Looking back through history through the lens of the Bible, Haase goes back to the very beginning and says . . .



The Garden of Eden is seen as a symbol of the realization of God's intention for all creation, and that Adam and Eve were entrusted with and became the guardians of God's magnificent creation. But this grand reality was soon fractured, Haase says, because Adam and Eve chose to follow their own egotistical agendas, committing the original sin. They were expelled from the Garden of Eden, and God's intention had suddenly been relegated to a hope, a dream. (Ibid, p. 90-91)

Whether one takes this story literally or as a metaphor, the significance is still the same.

After eventually choosing a people, beginning with Abraham and Sarah, over hundreds of years God gave instruction through the commandments and raised up prophets to remind the chosen people that their present situation was far removed from the paradise God had intended.

Then, where once God was the intended ruler of God's people, they insisted that a human ruler – a king – was also needed for Israel as other nations had among them.

Social injustice, the worship of other gods and sinful ethical and moral behavior were all symptomatic of the human ego and will masquerading as the lord of creation. But God hoped, with human cooperation, to once again restore creation to a place of blessing. Such a time was foreseen and declared as God's will among God's people.

Finally, the way was prepared by John the Baptist. And Jesus himself came proclaiming: "'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near; repent and believe the good news.'" (Mark 1:15)

John's gospel account tells us that Jesus said the kingdom He rules is not of/from this world. (John 18:36) It is the kingdom of the Spirit in which God and Christ rule in the hearts and souls of women and men, children and youth. It is one in which his subjects follow his way, in which the law is written upon their hearts.

It is characterized by justice, love and peace, just as the life of our Lord Jesus was lived.

Remember how Jesus befriended the social and religious outcasts, along with the wealthy and influential. His mission proclaimed in the synagogue in Nazareth was in fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah: to proclaim the good news to the poor, release of captives, healing and forgiveness, God's favor and acceptance once again. Jesus elevated the status of women and children, who were often considered second-class citizens in his time and culture. His parables and life spoke of grace, holiness and sacrificial love. So, if you want to know and see what God's kingdom looks like, take a look at the life and teachings of Jesus the Christ.

Luke's Book of Acts of the Apostles (2:43-47) provides a description of the early church which shows what happens when individual believers live out their commitment to the kingdom's peace, love and justice. (Ibid, p.93) Read through the second chapter especially.

When we twenty-first century Christians pray, "Thy kingdom come," we remember Abba God's



intention for us and how Jesus incarnated God's kingdom of love, peace and justice. We also call to mind how the early followers lived out its implications.

Remembering is just the beginning, though. One of the challenges in spiritual formation is to live out the kingdom characteristics as the early Christians did – in our individual lives, and in our daily routines. As Haase says, “The kingdom comes to realization when each one of us individually engages the world and brings peace, love and justice to it.” (Ibid.)

I believe John Wesley would have described this as spreading “scriptural holiness” across the land. For both Wesley and Haase, these are much more than just lofty ideals and aspirations but have very specific and challenging implications and applications in our daily lives. The choices we make in how we treat others, what we do with the gifts of creation, how we use our time and resources, are all indicators of whether or not we sincerely desire God's kingdom to be a reality here on earth.

This brings us to Christ's next sentence, which seems to flow directly from the previous.

† “Your will be done,” Jesus teaches us to pray, “on earth as it is in heaven.”

I would venture to guess that every one of us here today wants God's kingdom to come. Most may believe that Jesus has already ushered in his kingdom here on earth; for all who receive him as savior and proclaim and live Jesus as Lord, have entered his kingdom. And most long for a greater fulfillment of Christ's reign in every heart and nation.

But the reality is that many Christians believe that it's the other people who need Jesus to show them the right way. We don't always want to admit to ourselves or others – some not even to God – that we don't always seek to live as true and faithful subjects of God, our heavenly Father.

We may not have truly surrendered our will and hearts to God. And the reality is that while we can only pray for God's kingdom and will to be done in others, we each have the choice to make God's will our own.

This is the act of personal surrender, exemplified by Mary of Nazareth, the mother of Jesus. The bible tells us in Luke the wonderful but awesome account of the angel Gabriel announcing to the young Mary that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and she would conceive the child who would save his people, indeed the world, from their sins. “Here I am”, she said, “the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” (Luke 1:28)

Jean-Pierre de Caussade, an eighteenth century teacher of Christian spiritual formation, spoke of personal surrender to God, using Mary as the example. He wrote of surrendering to the opportunities and challenges of each present moment to further God's kingdom by surrendering one's will to God's in some tangible way.

Wesley's Covenant Prayer, downstairs in the Adult Sunday School room, and close to the desk in my pastor's study for over thirty years, embodies the attitude of heart and mind in being an



instrument of God's will.

Of course, the clearest and most difficult example in the bible of surrendering one's will to God's is that of Jesus himself. The night before his death on the cross, he walks with his disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. There he went aside to pray alone.

Matthew records, (26:39) "Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.'"

† So, seeking God's will to be done on earth most definitely includes the choices we make and the actions we take. A moment of prayer and reflection in search of God's will in a particular situation could be to ask ourselves that familiar question: WWJD – What would Jesus do? This, of course, assumes we know what Jesus actually said and did – which requires us to read and remember the gospels, and often praying upon our decisions before making them.

And for the truly contemplative, seeking and doing God's will can even include each moment of every day.

But in addition to the day to day seeking and doing of God's will, we are occasionally confronted with major decisions -- involving career direction, personal relationships, or other aspects of our lives.

These usually affect those closest to us. Sometimes the decision is not a moral or ethical one. Sometimes the choice is between alternative means of serving God and God's kingdom.

In his book, Haase offers what I believe is a good approach to what he calls "faith-based" decisions. It includes awareness, assessment and action, with several aspects to each of those steps. Actually, I realized in reading it that it's been the process I have used for over forty years of my life as I have consciously sought God's will. But, I never set it down in steps as Haase has.

He also recommends a quarterly life review with a spiritual friend or director, which I would be glad to share with those who are interested in learning more.

And remember, in all of these, it is important to invite the Holy Spirit to lead us, guide us, equip us, and empower us . . . just as Jesus promised He would.

So when we pray, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." we are seeking to know and respond to God's will as do the obedient and loyal angels, as did Jesus himself, as did the early believers, and as have all faithful disciples of Jesus Christ and children of God, our heavenly Father.

When you use your time and resources to show and sharing God's love with others, you are



living the Lord's Prayer.

When you act fairly and justly, you are living the Lord's Prayer. When you promote or make peace, you are living the Lord's Prayer.

When you are ambassadors for Christ by sharing the gospel or the ministry of reconciliation, you are living the Lord's Prayer.

When you facilitate healing in body, mind or spirit, you are living the Lord's Prayer.

I am glad that we have a number of ways here at CCUMC in which we are helping to build God's kingdom.

In these difficult times of uncertainty in our world, remember the good news of God's loving presence and power! Let it give you true peace, even which passes understanding.

Continue to let yourself be moved with concern and compassion to care for others as well as yourself.

I invite, encourage and challenge you to discuss today's message later today or during the week. Try using one or more of the suggested acts of kindness from the sermon notes. And share a witness with us during the week or next Sunday.

Well, I think you get the picture. Let us pray it together. "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Amen!

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Application: I will seek and do God's will this week and beyond by \_\_\_\_\_

I will help to bring God's kingdom on earth by \_\_\_\_\_

Suggested Intentional or Random Act of Kindness for the week . . .

† Freely offer your skills to help someone

† Prepare an UMCOR kit, or make a special offering next Sunday

† Make dinner for a family in need

† Give a tip to the person at the drive through window

† Speak up for someone who is being put down