

***Thy Kingdom Come***  
Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 6:9-13  
June 7, 2015  
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## **I. Introduction**

A week ago yesterday, we were closing up our session of Annual Conference and we always close Annual Conference with what I think is the highlight of the week's events which is our service of ordination as we bring in new folks into the ordained ministry of our church. And there had been a lot of focus at Annual Conference about all of the work that is happening in Baltimore. It was simultaneously very hard stuff to hear in terms of the really hard and intractable issues around poverty and race that Baltimore is wrestling with, but also very exciting to see all of the wonderful, creative things that our churches are doing to address some of the needs of Baltimore.

And as a sort of sign of our solidarity after the ordination service was done, our Bishop led all of the clergy out into the streets of Baltimore, all with our regalia on and singing hymns just as a sign of our being part of the healing of that city. And the Bishop ended that march with us all gathered in a circle together and then he started to pray. And then, as he closed up his prayer, he said those words that we all know so well which is to say, "And now as our Lord Jesus taught us to pray, so we pray together," and then we launched into the "Our Father."

It was a very powerful moment and there was this almost palpable sense of the Spirit moving out and among us and out into the city. And it just struck me very forcefully what an incredible gift we have in these wonderful and ancient words, that are Jesus' really only instruction to us about what prayer should look like. Jesus prayed all the time and we hear those stories in the scriptures, but this is the moment, these are the words that Jesus gives us that teach us what that's to be like, so that when we're anxious about what prayer should be, we don't have to be. We know what it looks like. We have this wonderful example of what a complete prayer to God is about.

So, we're spending these weeks in June unpacking The Lord's Prayer so we can learn not only about what we're saying when we say those words that sometimes we gloss over fairly quickly, but also so we can learn what are the elements there that we can carry into other pieces of our prayer life.

Last week we started off with that first phrase, "Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name." And we're continuing this week with the next couple of phrases, "Thy Kingdom come and Thy will be done."

## **II. Beginning with God**

Now, the first thing I want to point out as we start to engage that is looking at that first half of the prayer, what is notably absent? It's the word "I," right? There is no focus at the beginning of this prayer at all on my mind, who I am. All of the focus is on God. Now that's not to say that it is inappropriate to have ourselves as part of the prayer experience and we certainly go to God in prayer when we are in need of one sort or another. And that's appropriate and we're going to start to talk a little bit about that next week.

But what Jesus models in this prayer is that prayer always starts with a focus on who God is. It never starts with a focus on who I am and what my needs are. Our prayer always flows out of who God is and what God's will is for us.

### **III. It's about the Kingdom**

Now to say that the focus is on God is not to say that it is simply a spiritual affirmation. Jesus' primary preaching topic was the verse of the prayer that we have today, "Thy Kingdom come." Jesus spent all of his time talking about the in-breaking of the kingdom of God. And that was not for Jesus' audience a spiritual reality. Everybody who heard Jesus preach when Jesus started talking about the kingdom of God understood that to be a political, physical reality.

When King Herod hears about the birth of a messiah, he understands that immediately to be a political threat and he embarks on the slaughter of the children in Bethlehem to make sure that he suppresses that as quickly as possible. When Jesus comes to Jerusalem in Passion Week, he is not killed by the Jewish community for being a theological heretic. He is killed by the Romans because he's a political threat. The people in Jesus' day understood very, very clearly that the kingdom of God was not about our spiritual lives only. It was a call and a promise that had profoundly political implications, and the powers of the day, and frankly the powers of every day, understand that to be true and understand it to be a threat. Because what it is about is that our ultimate allegiance is not to a political or economic system or even a nation, wonderful as our nation might be. That our ultimate allegiance is to a kingdom that calls for justice for everyone and peace for everyone.

Anglican theologian and Bishop, N.T. Wright says, "Western Christianity has tended to say Jesus wasn't into politics, he came with a spiritual message -- the timeless and eternal truths of personal salvation." "Well, that clearly won't do," Bishop Wright says. "We have to cut out the tell-tale phrase 'on earth as it is in Heaven.' Our prayer here is that how we live here is to mirror what it looks like in God's perfect kingdom."

The early church understood that kingdom to be breaking into this world through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It was a physical reality that we as a community are called to participate in. And the kingdom comes to its fruition, comes to its conclusion in the book of Revelations not by our being snatched up into some heavenly realm but having the new Jerusalem coming to earth and transforming our reality here.

So, when Jesus tells us that our prayer is to go "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven," what he is talking about is that God's kingdom become manifest here. That has profoundly political, socioeconomic, racial, gender identity ramifications. It's about who we are as a community and how we are called to live.

#### **IV. Not a wish but a call**

Theologian James Mulholland writes, "When we pray 'Thy Kingdom come,' we are not making a request. We are taking a vow." If we're serious about this prayer, we're not just wishing for good stuff to happen. We are placing ourselves in the place where we become agents of that change and vehicles of God's grace into the world so that that kingdom comes through our actions as we work with God to transform the world. This is why even though we have been a reconciling congregation for seven years now, we continue to celebrate it and talk about it and advocate. Because you know what, the kingdom has not come to its fullness on this issue, amen?

We continue to talk about racial equity and we're going to take up a collection at our Bishop's request and as an action of the General Conference, we're going to take up a collection during our offering to work on wholeness for the city of Baltimore because while the kingdom has broken in through the ministry of Jesus Christ, the kingdom has not come to its fullness on this issue, amen?

All of the work that we are called to do is about becoming agents of God's kingdom on earth looking like it looks in heaven. So, that we're going to march next Saturday in the Pride Parade with 17 other Methodist churches because the church has to have witness there. This is about celebrating and affirming and embracing all people regardless of what they look like, regardless of who they love, because that's what the kingdom on earth looks like. We engage in hunger ministries because the kingdom of God on earth is a place where everybody has enough food. We open the doors of our church and invite people to sleep here because the kingdom of God is a place where everybody has a place to lay their heads.

Methodist Bishop Will Willimon writes, "In saying 'Your Kingdom come,' we acknowledge that faith in Jesus is not simply an idea or an emotion. It is a concrete reality in which we are to become a part or else appear to be out of step with the way that things are now that God has come into the world in Jesus."

We wrestle a lot with where God's call for us is in our personal lives, in our lives as a church, and the second part of our phrase today, "Thy will be done," is an invitation to place ourselves where God's will is at work. And how do we know that? How do we know where God is calling us in a career, in a move, in a decision to engage in seminary? We know because we know what the kingdom looks like and everything that we're about and everything that we do is about building that kingdom. That doesn't mean everybody goes into ordained ministry. That means that everybody

here has a gift that is to be used for the up-building of the kingdom. And you can do that as a teacher, as an attorney, as a public servant, as a journalist, as a doctor. Any field has the opportunity to be used to bring about the kingdom of God. So, all of our calls are sacred. But our question is, how do I use the gifts that God has given me to bring about a kingdom of wholeness and peace, so that when I say, "Your will be done," I'm saying "Your will be done in my life so that it can be done in the world"?

## **V. Conclusion**

So, it's very appropriate as we march in Baltimore and as we march next week in the Pride Parade to celebrate this gift of the Lord's Prayer in which we place ourselves in the position of not just wishing for a world of justice and peace but in a place where we are part of God's work to bring that kingdom about so that all of God's children can celebrate who they are as people of sacred worth and sacred children of a passionately loving parent.

Amen.