THE LORD’S PRAYER: THY KINGDOM COME

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Luke 11:1-4 Matthew 13:33

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# SETTING THE CONTEXT

 Two of the four Gospel writers share the story of the Lord’s Prayer. Matthew and Luke show Jesus teaching it in response to the disciples’ request, “Lord, teach us to pray.” In this request, they are asking Jesus to tell them what is most important to him. What does ***he*** want them to pray for and how? Matthew sets this question in the midst of a long teaching by Jesus. Luke sets it after the story of Jesus visiting with Martha and Mary. It’s a story about what is important. Martha is frustrated that Mary is sitting at Jesus’ feet listening to him while she’s doing all the work to get dinner ready. She asks Jesus to tell her sister to get busy and help her. He responds by telling her what is really important – “one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better part.” (Luke 10:42) Jesus is changing things. His priorities, his values are different than many of ours. We continue to need him to teach us what is important to him. “Lord, teach us to pray.”

Read Luke 11:1-4

When Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God, he used stories called parables. Parables are not a direct description of God’s will, but are similes or metaphors; “The kingdom of heaven is like…” In this parable, Jesus compares the kingdom to an ordinary household item.

Read Matthew 13:33

# THE SERMON

 **What would it look like if the world were the way God intended it to be?** As I tried to imagine the kingdom of God, my first thoughts were what it is not. If the kingdom of God was here and now, there would be no war, no violence, no borders, no political campaigns, no hunger, no greed. I had to stop myself and ask but what would it *be*? How does Jesus and the prophets describe it? People would live in peace and harmony with each other and with all creation. People would share so everyone had enough. We would not retaliate when we wronged each other. We would love our neighbor and we’d love our opponents as well. Imagine how different the world would be, our communities would be if we loved those we disagreed with and worked with them rather than ridiculed or belittled them. People would know they are loved and valuable so they would not have to show off or push down others. It’s kind of hard to imagine the fullness of kingdom of God, but I think we know it when we catch a glimpse of it.

 Praying for God’s kingdom on earth is a lot to ask**. It has a future tense to be sure – someday God will make all things right and our prayer will be answered, but it also has a present tense.** Jesus kept proclaiming the kingdom of God is at hand, it is here. This was a central message of his preaching. (Luke 4:43) In the verses following his teaching of the Lord’s Prayer in both gospels, he tells his disciples to be bold. “Ask” he said, “and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you.” (Luke 11:9) He encourages us to seek the kingdom of God in this world and this time.

When we pray the Lord’s Prayer each week, we ask for this, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” This is a very dangerous thing to pray, isn’t it? It was in Jesus’ day. There were real kingdoms in Jesus’ world. Jesus and his disciples lived in this political system; they lived in the kingdom of Herod and in the kingdom of the Roman emperor. It was a political term; praying for God’s kingdom to come on earth meant you were praying for God to be king of the earth and not the Roman rulers[[1]](#endnote-1) and that could get you crucified- and it did get them killed. Our prayer sometimes puts us at odds with the political status quo. **I hope in this political season; we pay attention to this part of our weekly prayer and we ask ourselves what leaders will help us mirror the kingdom of God.**

 As theologian Marjorie Suchoki said, “The reign of God in our lives becomes an echo of God’s will being done in heaven.”[[2]](#endnote-2) I really like how the skit last week brought this up. When God started getting specific about the pray-ers anger, greed and lust, he got defensive. God’s response really stuck with me, “I thought you were praying for my will to be done. If that is to happen, it will have to start with the ones who are praying for it. Like you-for example.”[[3]](#endnote-3) **If we mean our weekly prayer for “thy kingdom to come” we must cooperate with God to make it happen!** John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, said “we are saved by grace” ***and*** “we are saved by grace for good works.” God’s saving love is free; it doesn’t have to be earned, but it does invite us to share that love. We are invited to participate in bringing God’s “kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.”

In the parable we read, Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to yeast. Let’s think about that a minute. Yeast is hidden at least until it starts to act. The yeast itself is not easy to see, but you can sure see it working when the dough starts to rise. And a little yeast can make flour move! It also takes time to work. The yeast doesn’t instantly make the dough ready for bread, but you have to set it aside and give it time to work. What does that tell us about “thy kingdom come?” Doesn’t it encourage us to look for God’s kingdom in the ordinary? Doesn’t it invite us to live Jesus’ way and see what happens - to be dough infused with yeast? **At least in my experience, sometimes you do something because it seems right at the time not knowing how God will use it, and it expands in ways you couldn’t imagine.**

 About sixteen years ago, our girls were young and I was so grateful for them; I wanted to do something to express to God how much I appreciated the gift of them. When our colleague told us about this ministry he had started with orphaned and abandoned children in Ethiopia, I felt like this might be a way to thank God for our girls by supporting two other girls about their age who were in need. I was a little nervous about it, I had never done anything like that before. But finally, we decided it was something we wanted to do. We got pictures of two little girls named Nigist and Zeinaba. I never took the time to write them, but every month I was reminded of them and of my gratitude to God. After 6 years, we were able to go to Ethiopia with our daughters and we got to meet Nigist and Zeinaba face-to-face. We were all very shy with each other, but I could see how they had grown and I felt a connection especially with Nigist more profoundly. Because Nigist lived at one of our facilities, I was able to spend more time with her and I got the sense that somehow she knew I was hers. I learned on that trip that the children prayed for me and all the sponsors twice a day. I have to admit that I was a little ashamed that I did not think of them nearly as often. We traveled back to Ethiopia again and again and I got to watch them grow. I still have every letter and drawing they sent us over the years. I watched Nigist mature into a leader of the other girls in the orphanage and we became Facebook friends. And last year we celebrated her graduation from high school and rejoiced when she was admitted into college. You see, the Ethiopian government pays the tuition of the top 10% students. This year we got to see Zeinaba again and celebrate with her that she graduated from high school and is attending a vocational college in accounting. **It started with a desire to show gratitude, but the Divine yeast worked in our lives as well as in theirs; it expanded our sense of family, it gave us a life-long purpose and friends and experiences that have profoundly changed our lives and it allowed us to participate in changing the course of these two precious lives**. Well now, it’s three we recently started sponsoring a young boy. We’ll continue to support “our” Ethiopian girls through college and then we’ll ask for two other children. For me, Mother’s Day has expanded because I’ve learned that children unrelated to me are still family through Christ and God multiplies the joy I experience in watching my children grow and succeed by expanding who I consider “my children.” A little yeast has made a big difference. It’s given us glimpses of the kingdom of God.

 There are so many ways we can cooperate with God so that God’s kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus teaches us and shows us the way over and over again. Read Matthew 5-7 this week to see him apply kingdom principles to specific areas of life.

***I invite you to pray: “In my choices today, Lord, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”***

***“In my life, Lord, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”***

***“In my family, Lord, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”***

 ***“In my business or school, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”***

***“In my city, Lord, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”***

Our international United Methodist Church will be meeting in General Conference starting Tuesday and I ask that you would pray every day from May 10-20, “In our General Conference and in our church, Lord, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” May the yeast of the kingdom work through all our lives. Amen.

1. Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), p. 131-133. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki. In God’s Presence: Theological Reflections on Prayer. (St Louis: Chalice Press, 1996) p. 107. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. [www.catholiccatechist.org](http://www.catholiccatechist.org) credits this skit to “The Lord’s Prayer / Confession” by Don Kimball & Anna Scally at [www.cornerstonemedia.org](http://www.cornerstonemedia.org/). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)