

Your Kingdom Come

July 24, 2016

Dr. Frank Allen, Pastor

First Presbyterian Church of Kissimmee, Florida

Luke 11:1-13

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” 2
He said to them, “When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.

 Your kingdom come.

3 Give us each day our daily bread.

4 And forgive us our sins,

 for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

 And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

5 And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6 for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ 7 And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

9 “So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 11 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? 12 Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? 13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

TEACH US TO PRAY

“Lord, teach us to pray.”

That’s what the disciples wanted Jesus to teach them long ago.

And I think many people want to learn the same lesson today.

What is prayer and how do we do it?

Can we even teach others to pray?

Apparently Jesus thought this was possible.

John the Baptist had given his followers words to use in prayer.

And now Jesus does the same for his disciples.

I wonder why the disciples had such an urgent need to learn about prayer.

Perhaps they had a sense of foreboding about the trip to Jerusalem.

They felt weak and vulnerable.

They suspected that some great tragedy loomed on the horizon.

And so, when they saw Jesus’ devotion to prayer (11:1) they realized their own need to pray.

They wanted to be more like him.

They wanted to learn how to pray.

PRAYER AND TRAGEDY

When I think about prayer in the modern world,

I often think the occurrence of some tragic event.

Whenever something bad happens everyone sends out their “prayers” to those who are affected by the flood or the fire or whatever. What they mean is that they are thinking about those who have suffered in some way.

They are mindful of this tragedy and how it has affected those in harm’s way.

“Mindfulness” can be very helpful.

People are often motivated to alleviate suffering when they are mindful of the needs of others. And this kind of prayer is good because it is also personal and specific.

We have a prayer list in our newsletter.

Each week someone calls me or send me an email and says, “Please put my brother, my sister or my dear friend on the prayer list.”

And we do. It’s a way of sharing news about that person and also a way of being mindful of their needs.

You may have noticed that this list is quite long, and when I go through it, sometimes it can be a bit overwhelming. When we are mindful of the suffering of just a small part of our world, it causes us to consider our own weakness and vulnerability.

And perhaps that too is a good thing.

Often it is weakness that motivates us to seek the Divine.

We pray because our life is out of control.

We need to pray.

And so we too join the disciples in saying,

“Lord, teach us to pray.”

Or to put it another way, “God help us.”

Of course, “God help us” can be for some people a sign of resignation.

Some say, “God help us” because nothing is working, and they have given up.

But, the cry, “God help us” can be the first lesson of faith ... if we have a proper understanding of the nature of God.

FATHER

In response to the disciple’s request Jesus talks first about the nature of the God to whom we pray. Jesus said, “When you pray say this ...”

And the first word we are instructed to say is “Father.”

The gospel of Luke emphasizes the prayer life of Jesus, and Jesus as the Son of God prayers to his Father. But, as adopted children of the heavenly King, we too can begin our prayers with the word Father.

God is the Father who loves and cares for His children. God is the Father who rejoices with us in our victories and agonizes with us in our defeats.

The first word about God is not a word of separation and otherness. The first word about God is a word about the One who draws near.

God is close to us.

God is a part of our life.

God is our Father.

We are just one word into the model prayer, but it is an important word.

The God we pray to is knowable.

The God we pray to is within arm's reach.

When we call God Father, it indicates a childlike confidence in God.

We trust God to give us what we need.

The importance of calling God Father is illustrated in verses 11-13 of our lesson for today.

Even sinful, flawed fathers try to feed their children what they need. Our heavenly Father, who is perfect, will do even more.

So we call God Father.

HALLOWED BE THY NAME

But, in the same breath we also say, "Hallowed be thy name."

Another way to say this is "God's name is holy or sanctified or set apart."

In prayer two things are of equal importance.

First, God is Father, and so we are God's children.

And second, God is holy, set apart, high and lifted up.

God is an awesome God, but God is also Father.

God created the heavens and the earth, but God is an intimate part of that creation.

God himself is with us.

As the old hymn puts it,
“His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.”

We often use the Lord’s Prayer (as we find it in Matthew) in the liturgy of the church.

Every week we end the prayers of the people with this prayer.

That’s a helpful practice.

Every word of the Lord’s Prayer is meaningful.
And when we are in dire straits and the words don’t come, praying the Lord’s Prayer verbatim can remind us of the promises and power of prayer.

But, Jesus’ prayer also serves as a model for the creation of our own personal prayers.

It is an example of the attitudes which should accompany prayer.

This first sentence suggests that all good prayers needs to have a balance between that which we know and that which is above and beyond us.

God is our Father and God is more than we can imagine.

“Father, your name is holy.”

YOUR KINGDOM COME

The second phrase in this model prayer is “your kingdom come.”

Notice that we do not say, “My kingdom come.”

Prayer does not begin with what we want but a desire to get ourselves in tune with what God is already doing.

The kingdom of God has come, is coming and will come.

In this political season we hear that our world is broken and needs to be fixed.

I would be hard pressed to argue with that.
But, if the world is broken and needs to be fixed, who is going to do the
“fix’en”?

Politicians are not going to fix what is broken.
The police are not going to fix what is broken.
Religion is not going to fix what is broken.
Our institutions are often part of the problem.

If we look at the world *we* have created, then there is indeed reason to despair.

But, the phrase, “your kingdom come” reminds us that, in the final analysis, this is *not our world*.
We anticipate the coming of God’s kingdom that was begun in the ministry of God’s Son, Jesus.

In faith we look at the world in a different way.
We look at the world with a sense of hope and confidence because we believe in the kingdom that comes.

When we pray, “Your kingdom come” it is a statement of faith and a call to action.

If we believe in the kingdom that comes, we will not be hoodwinked by those who prey on our fears about the future. We will not be paralyzed by those who say nothing can be done.

We know better.
We pray, “Your kingdom come.”

Matthew’s version of this prayer makes it plain.
The kingdom of God is not just about heaven.
It’s also about earth.
In that version of this prayer the phrase is “your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.”

We are to look at earth through the lens of heaven.

If God, the Creator of heaven and earth is also our Father, the one who cares for us with compassion and love, then it stands to reason that this Father God is a part of our story.

His kingdom comes.

His kingdom comes into our lives here and now.

STANDING ON THE FAULT LINE

But, kingdoms do not come without a battle.

The kingdoms of “this world” have always resisted the coming of God’s kingdom.

And so, when we pray, “your kingdom come” we commit ourselves to a new way of life.

When we say that Jesus is Lord that also means Caesar (or any other politician) is *not* Lord.

We place ourselves right in the middle of a great battle, a cataclysmic shift, a new creation.

N.T. Wright in his book *Simply Christian* puts it this way,

“We are called to live at the overlap between heaven and earth … the earth that has yet to be fully redeemed as one day it will be …

We are caught on a small island near the point where these tectonic plates—heaven and earth, future and present—are scrunching themselves together.

Be ready for earthquakes!”

That’s what Paul was talking about in the eighth chapter of his letter to the Romans.

He said that the whole creation is groaning in labor pains waiting for the new world to be born. And we are a part of the process.

Prayer is learning to groan with God.

Prayer is longing for the new world that God is bringing.

To put it another way, by the power of God's Spirit we resonate with the pain of the world.

That's prayer.

The heart of the gospel begins at the cross.
And the heart of those who seek the kingdom of God begins in those places where the world groans for something new.

That's prayer.

How can we say with integrity, "Your kingdom come?"
Where does our groaning for a new world find expression?

Jesus gives us two suggestions: bread and forgiveness.

DAILY BREAD

Jesus said we should pray, "Give us each day our daily bread."

Note. Jesus did *not* say, "Give me each day my daily bread." Jesus said, "Give *us* each day *our* daily bread."

If we groan with the compassion of God for the coming of the kingdom, then we also are a part of God's bread for the world agenda.

In our newsletter this week Pope Francis is quoted as saying, "Pray for the hungry and then feed them."

Prayer leads to action.

The coming of God's kingdom can be found in the giving and the receiving of our daily bread. Many of you know that. I'm proud of the way this church participates each week in the feeding of the hungry.

But, there is more to daily bread than just feeding the hungry. It is recognizing our own hunger and our own dependence upon God.

We too need to be fed daily ...not just with food but also with the bread of life, the promise of eternity.

We are fragile creatures, and daily bread is not a given. When we pray for our daily bread, we are freed from the delusions of self-sufficiency and independence. And instead we learn to trust in the grace that is given to us each day as it is needed.

Someone once defined evangelism as one beggar telling another beggar where to find food.

I like that. It fits with what our Lord taught us to pray.
“Give us each day our daily bread.”

So, the kingdom that comes is marked by the giving of daily bread.

FORGIVENESS

And the kingdom of God is also marked by forgiveness.

Jesus said we should pray, “Forgive us our sins as we forgive everyone indebted to us.”

Once again notice that Jesus does not say, “Forgive *my* sins ...”

Jesus says, “Forgive *us our* sins ...”

Sin is about more than just when I mess up ... although it includes that. Sin is about how we mess up as a community of faith. Sin is about how we mess up as a country.

Sin is about how the whole world is messed up.

Sin is pervasive.

All have sinned. That’s what the Bible tells us.
And sin is part of a system built on fear and retribution.

We not only get angry; we also try to get even.

We see it in our politics.

We see it in acts of terrorism and war.

We see it in a system of greed that puts hard working people at an unfair advantage.

How should we pray in a world that is coming apart at the seams?
What can we do when we are part of a system that is so corrupt and sinful?

We can't do anything.
This problem is too big for us.

But, as Christians we believe that God has already done something about it.

In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus we see God's answer to a sinful world.

It is forgiveness.

"Father forgive them."
Those words, spoken from the cross, changed everything.

Those words marked the beginning of God's kingdom. They are the words that began a new creation.

God's forgiveness is the only thing that can save our world. God's forgiveness ends the cycle of fear and retribution.

And God's forgiveness enables us to forgive debts that we once thought were unforgivable.

DELIVER US FROM EVIL

There is nothing new in what I've said about prayer.
In a sense prayer is very simple.
Even the very young can memorize this prayer.

But, prayer is hard because of the demands that go with it. That's why Jesus also tells us to pray,
"Don't let us be tempted by the world."

Matthew's version of the prayer clarifies this petition.
Matthew adds, "But, deliver us from evil."

Prayer is spiritual warfare.

We strive not just against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers.
And our “weapons” in this contest are not guns but bread and forgiveness.

PERSISTENCE AND PRESENCE

Sometimes, of course, it seems like the kingdoms that use guns are winning.

That's why Jesus adds the little story that promotes persistence in prayer.

He said even a reluctant neighbor will give you a loaf of bread in the middle of the night if you are persistent. How much more will God give you what you need if you ask?

Even human fathers, who are often very flawed, will try to give good gifts to their children. How much more will God be willing to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask?

Now I must say that these examples have often been misunderstood.

They do not mean that if we ask loud enough and long enough that God will give us anything that we want.

“O Lord won’t you buy me a Mercedes Benz?”
That is not a good prayer!

But, what God does promise ... is presence.

Our persistence in prayer promotes the presence of God in our lives. Notice. The Holy Spirit is the gift that comes from persistent prayer. (11:13)

And it is the power of the Spirit that enables the community of faith to be the who she is called to be.

When the church is in the power of the Spirit, bread for the world and forgiveness become real possibilities.

His kingdom comes.

Through the power of the Spirit we really can be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

I would challenge you to spend some time this week reflecting on the Lord's prayer.

Use the Lord's prayer as a model for your own prayers.

Or simply pray the prayer as it is written
... and let it speak to you.

Ask and you will receive.
Seek and you will find.
Knock and the door will be opened.

Amen.