

Luke 11:2-4 The Kingdom - June 16

Two weeks ago, we introduced the Lord's Prayer, looking at both Matthew's and Luke's version. Bible. Of course, there is no "right" version, especially when you consider all the languages that have their own version. Jesus said, "Pray like this" - not "Pray this." Following is *The Lord's or Disciples' Prayer* written by the Mennonite theologian, Jamie Aprin-Ricci. As you reflect on the words - do they express Jesus' thoughts for you?

Father God, who invites us together as one body, one family, sister and brother. May your name be made holy by your Word. And may your kingdom be established here and now, in and through us. May your will be our first and most immediate priority, just as it is to the angels above. Provide for us all and only what we need for life together and obedience to you. Let the gift of your undeserved grace for us overflow from us unto those who have wronged us. Where everything that is owed is fully forgiven.

Lead us on your path, away from the empty promises of our selfish temptations. Rescue us from our scheme of sin and darkness which would take us from that path. For you are King, this is your kingdom and we are your citizens and servants. All we are, all we have and all we do is by your power for your glory alone in the past, in the present and in the future. Amen.

Two weeks ago we looked at the word "Father" and viewed the prayer as a creed to be confessed openly by living it rather something simply to be recited. Last week our focus was the meaning of the word "holy" or "hallowed." By making Jesus' name Holy, we honour God himself and by doing so, we renew our pact to be stewards of the earth. As we uphold the creator of this universe, we accept the role of steward and manager, in caring for it. Today we will consider the meaning of the coming of God's kingdom.

In the movie "Sister Act," Deloris, a mobster's girlfriend, played by Whoopi Goldberg, witnesses a killing and reports it to the authorities, who send her to a San Francisco convent to protect her from a mob "contract" to kill her. She's a cabaret singer, a gangster's girl, who knows the colourful life of gambling and loose living. The convent isn't exactly her cup of tea.

"What am I going to do here," she asks, "pray?"

“Pray!” answers her police protector wisely.

For many people, prayer is outmoded. With computers, cell phones, tablets, video games, prayer seems somewhat tame. With dazzling neon lights, sequin-covered dresses, dancing, drinking, and gambling until all hours, prayer to Deloris appears more than a little antiquated; it is simply passé.

Although she feels like a fish out of water, she tries to pray. As she says grace, she mixes phrases of the Lord’s Prayer with words of the Pledge of Allegiance. If Deloris was touched by the Holy Spirit, who reawakened her faith while in the convent, then it wasn’t long before she caught certain rhythms and found a way to make music out of prayer and turn apathy into praise.

Bandini, the aspiring writer in John Fante’s novel, *Ask the Dust*, was educated in a parochial school and the streets of a largely immigrant community. Having done some reading, he was convinced that Christianity has its limitations. Yet a sorrow pulls within his heart as he prays, “Almighty God, I am sorry I am now an atheist, but have you read Nietzsche? Ah, such a book! Almighty God, I will play fair in this. I will make you a proposition. Make me a great writer, and I will return to the church. And please, dear God, one more favour: make my mother happy. I don’t care about the old man; he’s got his wine and his health, but my mother worries so. Amen.”

Deloris and Bandini both have very limited views of God and the magnificent gift of prayer, but both - though they try to deny or ignore him - realize God cannot be overlooked. Nor can they bypass the reality of his kingdom. Nor can we. So we pray as Jesus taught us, “Your kingdom come,” or “May your kingdom come soon,” - confessing it with the depth of true sincerity - aware that the kingdom demands an explanation, an exploration, and exploitation.

During Jesus’ time, all lands were kingdoms - empires with emperors, monarchies with monarchs, principalities with princes, and nomadic tribes with Bedouin chieftains. There were moguls, autocrats, tyrants, dictators, and despots. Whether bounded by borders or not, the world was comprised of territorial kingdoms.

Jesus lived in the tetrarchy - the fourth part of a country or province in the ancient Roman Empire - of Herod Antipas, the son of a kingly father, Herod the Great.

Jesus visited Jerusalem, the centre of Jewish faith and the capital of a tiny kingdom of Jews. Both the Galilean tetrarchy - and the Jewish kingdom were realms of the Roman Empire, the domain of Caesar. Emperors were kings of kings. But Jesus did not ask us to pray for a Kingdom of real estate with knights and castles, and jewelled crowns. It is God's kingdom for which we pray "Come."

The second-century church father Irenaeus writes that the kingdom of God involves the renewal of creation. Seventeenth-century theologian Thomas Watson wrote 96 pages on the this Petition alone, saying God's kingdom is a kingdom of grace and glory. Other theologians described it as: a real kingdom, a sphere of sovereignty, or rule, with a king; a precious truth; God's power and God's will; the unifying note of the biblical Word [and] still the motivating force of the living church; the fulfillment of the Apostles' Creed and a kingdom of grace.

Helmut Thielicke, who was introduced two weeks ago, teaches us "that the kingdom of God is not a state or condition of this world, not an ideal order of nations and lifebut that it centres around a *person*: The king, God himself...The kingdom of God is where we find Jesus. The kingdom for which we pray to come is more than land and titles, more than property and privileges. It is something wondrously magnificent.

Jesus healed the sick and quieted troubled hearts with forgiveness, bringing peace, wholeness, and joy to the lives of the troubled. He proclaimed the kingdom not just in actions, but also in words. He told Pontius Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world." He said to Nicodemus, "No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

He sent others out to tell surrounding communities, "The kingdom of God is near." Jesus told the scribe who understood that the great commandment is to love God and others as oneself, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." He told the Pharisees who asked when the kingdom of God is coming, "the kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor when people say, "Here it is," or "There it is." The kingdom of God is within you.

Having the kingdom within is another way of saying that Jesus himself lives in you. It underscores his love. It makes clear his forgiveness. It means eternal peace. It

radiates joy. From the pages of Scripture, the words of Christ - and the interpretation of theologians, we discover that the understanding of this extraordinary kingdom is wrapped up in the lived-out Gospel. That's why it is near and yet something we continue to pray that will come this day and the next and on into eternity itself. And a one-word explanation, would be "Jesus." The kingdom of God is summed up in him, the Prince of Peace and King without equal.

Paul wrote, "The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Since the kingdom of God is the theme of the whole Bible, Old and New Testaments alike, and since it is centred in Jesus and his Gospel, this kingdom has dimensions. They are past, present, and future. They have height and depth.

Jesus taught that the ancient patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, are in the kingdom of God, a fact that looks to the past. Jesus also assured us that the kingdom has a present reality: "The kingdom of God is within you." And in his confessional prayer, Jesus taught his followers throughout out time to look to the future and pray, "Thy kingdom come" or "May your kingdom come soon."

In Revelation we read: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, ..I am the one who is, and who always was, and who is still to come, the Almighty One." In these words and truths, we find the three-dimensional depth of this kingdom for which we pray.

Paul saw those dimensions as an infinitude: "And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus, our Lord." It is Jesus himself who personifies this wondrous kingdom.

However, long before Jesus and for generations afterward, some Jews saw this petition as something external. The rabbis had long taught that these words should be the important ingredient of *all* prayers. Although not original with Jesus, the words of the Lord's Prayer were given an altogether new meaning. The Jews who prayed these words, took them to mean an end to Roman rule and the establishment of an autonomous political kingdom of their own, and no more.

Even today, some look upon the establishment of the State of Israel as a partial fulfillment of his age-old rabbinic petition. But such a one-dimensional view limits this petition from the broad width Jesus intends. The kingdom he proclaimed is to extend from eternity to eternity, from its unfathomable depth to its incalculable height - with all its mystery and mystical meanings. If limited to political frontiers and government, the kingdom is no longer either the kingdom of God nor the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of God is much bigger and needs a much larger messiah than the Israeli Prime Minister. This three-dimensional kingdom - past, present, and future - has such a Messiah, Jesus who fits its immense dimensions!

As Jesus sent the Seventy out to witness for the kingdom, he instructed them to say, "Peace to this house." Jesus explained, "If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you." This is the kind of peace that is given to those who will receive it. Jesus had the Seventy use the blessing of peace as a means of exploration of the kingdom. Jesus sent the Seventy out to share peace and by so doing to share the kingdom.

We receive that peace as a gift of grace. We are residents of the kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit has bestowed upon us citizenship in a kingdom that has no end. She invades our lives to guide us. She gives us the Gospel, and Christ becomes our king in a kingdom without borders, a kingdom without limits, in a kingdom that it takes a lifetime to explore. Jesus promised John: "Remain faithful, even when facing death, and I will give you the crown of life."

Explore the citizenship God has given you. Discover the peace it provides, the love that undergirds it, the forgiveness God grants daily to the repentant, the joy it manifests. Explore that citizenship, and you will find yourself within this kingdom without boundaries - and you will discover it is within you, bringing you unsurpassable joy!

To convey message of the kingdom of God, we must not limit ourselves by carrying it out in half-hearted ways; we need to exploit it. We need to live as fellow members of the kingdom, as those whom God uses to hasten its advent. There is great joy in being a part of this kingdom, and the real joy is in sharing it.

All the petitions in Jesus' Prayer are delivered as commands. We demand that God

once again bring his kingdom into our lives, now, as well as into the lives of everyone. It is a plaintive command that God not delay in coming again. It echoes the apostle John, who responded to the Lord's promise of "I am coming soon" by praying "Come, Lord Jesus."

How might we exploit this petition to its fullest for the world's benefit? Is it not by going out as the Seventy did? If we bring Christ to another house, we bring more than peace, we bring in the kingdom. If we share the Gospel with yet another family, we enlarge our own - and recognize that the kingdom's limits are big enough for all. Our going out, however, need not be a glum sharing of this message, even if some Christians live life as if under a black cloud. Love is not temperamental, but buoyant with the love of Christ and forgiving with the stain of his blood and the bright sunshine of his rising etched upon it. The kingdom may come through you to those you don't even know - if you let the gospel of Christ be demonstrated in your words, your actions, your attitudes, your lives.

During his last week of earthly ministry; Jesus, although suffering in great pain and agony, he did not accuse his enemies nor vilify them. He brought the kingdom to the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." His own team had failed to stand up for the kingdom. Judas betrayed him. Peter denied him. Yet Jesus did not cave in.

What was the cause, the goal, the purpose for which he struggled? It was the *righteousness* of God's kingdom, that it might come to sinners, to make them clean. It was the *riches* of the kingdom, that it might come to the poor, to fill them with good things. It was the *freedom* of the kingdom, that it might come to those in bondage. It was the *light* of the kingdom, that it might come to the blind. It was the *health* of the kingdom, that it might come to the lame, the sick, and the crippled. That was the purpose. Jesus endured doubt, suffering, pain, and sacrifice, yet he did not abandon the kingdom; he insured it. He exploited it for us, so that we might utilise its gifts for others.

The kingdom is ours because he gives it to us. He makes us members of the blood royal, princes and princesses, who not only know how to pray, "May your kingdom come soon" or "Thy kingdom come," but know how to share its invitation.

This is the kingdom we need to exploit - to the benefit of the world and the glory of God, as well as for the joy it grants. Surely if Whoopi Goldberg's character - Deloris - could catch that reality, there should be no doubt in our mind that Christian prayer is worthy of attention, and that God's kingdom is well worth the continuing petition, "Thy kingdom come."

The kingdom is both a gift and something for which we strive, a place we want to enter and in which we hope to live. So, our prayer for its coming is also a prayer for knowing how to equip ourselves to be its citizens and knowing how to collect the treasures that matter in a place where the only currency is love. Amen.