

26 January 2020  
Luke 11:1-4; 17:20-21  
Your Kingdom Come  
FMC at Bethany Manor Sunday

As the theme here at Bethany Manor for the month of January is prayer, I decided to focus on the Lord's prayer, a prayer most, if not all of us, learnt when we were children, a



prayer many recite regularly during worship.

Rather than focus on the entire prayer, I want to focus on just three words in the Lord's Prayer: **Your kingdom come**. What does Jesus mean when he urges his disciples to pray *Your kingdom come*, especially when this lay at the very heart of Jesus' ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing?

Now it's tempting to think about a kingdom as referring to a place with specified borders. The United Kingdom comes to mind. When Jesus uses the phrase, Your Kingdom come, he's not thinking about a specific country or nation. Rather, the Kingdom Jesus is talking about refers to the Reign of God, where the emphasis is on God's rule, and God's will being done.

Praying for God's reign of peace and justice on earth was not unique to Jesus. One of the regular synagogue prayers of the Jews in Jesus' day, the Kaddish, included the line, **"May God [he] let his kingdom rule in your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime of the whole house of Israel, speedily and soon."** The Jews of Jesus' day knew about praying "Your kingdom come." So, when the Pharisees ask Jesus, as they do in Luke 17:20, when the kingdom of God is coming, they are asking an important question. **When** will God establish God's kingdom? **When?**

For the **Pharisees**, God's Kingdom would come when everyone scrupulously followed and obeyed God's Law. Another Jewish group, known as the **Zealots**, understood it very differently. God's kingdom would only come after the hated Roman occupiers were driven out of the Holy Land. So, the Zealots sought to drive out the Romans through acts of violence and terrorism. The Zealots believed that once the Romans were gone the land would be purified and God's kingdom would come.

The Pharisees weren't wrong in longing for God's kingdom to come or when they wondered when it would finally come to pass. Their mistake was in looking for the God's Kingdom to come in the wrong way and as a result, failed to see it when it was right before their eyes.

When I lived in a different place many years ago, I curled once a week during the winter months. I was on a team with three others, two of whom I didn't know very well. Anyway, one day, I was in the Post Office and struck up a conversation with another person who was getting the mail. I introduced myself to him, to which, he replied, "yes, I know who you are. I'm Bob, and we're on the same curling team." And I looked at him, and suddenly it dawned on me that, sure enough, it was him. He was wearing different clothes and had a cap on his head. He looked totally different in the curling rink than he did in the Post Office.

Has this ever happened to you? I was so embarrassed that I didn't recognize him, wished there was a rock nearby that I could crawl under. The point is, I was only used to seeing him at the curling rink wearing his curling clothes. I wasn't prepared nor did I expect to see him in a different location wearing different clothes. The result was I didn't recognize him even though he stood right in front of me.



A poignant verse in the gospel of John says: *He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.* (John 1:10)

In response to the Pharisees question about when the kingdom of God was coming, Jesus said: *The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, Look, here it is!' or There it is!*

What does he mean by this? Jesus is NOT saying, the arrival of the reign of God is unobservable. Nor is he saying that God's kingdom won't be evident in a concrete, visible

way; for clearly in other places in the Gospel he does expect the kingdom to be visible and observable. Rather, what Jesus is saying to the Pharisees is because of the way they are looking, they will NOT see God's kingdom.

There are many stories about the Pharisees watching and observing Jesus. They observed Jesus **healing the cripple woman**, but because he did it on the Sabbath, it couldn't possibly be a sign of God's kingdom coming. They watched as **Jesus ate and drank**, but because he did so with tax collectors and sinners, the Pharisees called him a glutton and a drunkard. They watched as he **healed a person with dropsy**, but because Jesus did it on the Sabbath, the Pharisees couldn't imagine the kingdom of God was among them. What Jesus said and did was beyond their imagination, beyond their expectations, beyond their vision of what they thought God could do.

We often say, "seeing is believing," but in many cases, it's actually the believing that enables the seeing. The Pharisees assumed God only worked in ways they thought possible, in ways they agreed with and approved of. When Jesus said and did things that didn't fit into their preconceptions of how God works and acts, the Pharisees said it wasn't possible. They became closed and couldn't see God standing right in front of them.

If we pay attention to what Jesus is doing throughout the Gospel, we will know that Jesus is telling them to wake up, remove their blinders and realize that the reign of God has come upon them and is actually in their midst because he himself is among them. The reign of God is present among them in his own preaching, teaching, and healing. Jesus demonstrated in his life, death, and resurrection what the reign of God is all about. He called people to repent, he extended God's forgiveness to people, he liberated those enslaved to sickness and demons, he ate with sinners and outcasts and in doing so proclaimed God's love for the unloved, he embodied God's peace and justice in his own relationships with people, both the powerful and the powerless, and in his death and resurrection God revealed that the power of God is stronger than the power of evil and human sin and even death itself.

In short, in all that Jesus said and did, he proclaimed the good news that God's reign had drawn near. The Pharisees and many others were too blind to see the presence of God's reign right in their midst, because why?

- Maybe they were too much like you and me. Perhaps they were just too bound by tradition, had heard the biblical stories so often that they simply tuned themselves out.
- Perhaps they were just too preoccupied with this and that, too busy talking to God instead of listening, really listening to hear God's voice, that they couldn't hear God's Kingdom coming.
- Perhaps they were so used to thinking that their way was the right way of thinking that they became closed to hearing or seeing anything new. They were looking for

God's kingdom with the wrong set of eyes.

Now, let's return to the phrase in the Lord's Prayer, **your kingdom come**. Why does Jesus teach his disciples to pray for God's reign to come when it is so evidently already in their midst in his person and ministry?

The short answer is God's kingdom is both *here and now* **AND** *a future reality*. At some point God will hold a magnificent end-time banquet when people will come from east and west and north and south and sit at table in the kingdom of God (13:29).

Even though the reign of God was brought near in a vivid and real way through Jesus, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that the reign of God is not yet fully here, that we are not yet feasting at the banquet in the reign of God. For one thing, too many people still go to bed hungry. We live in a system which creates poverty, pollution, and climate change. Violence continues to reign. Closer to home, settlers and indigenous people have a long way to go on our reconciliation journey. We do not always forgive as God has forgiven us. In short, we sin. Where is God's reign of peace and justice in all this brokenness? As Romans 8:22 says, the whole creation is in bondage, groaning in labor pains while it waits for the final redemption.

We and the world we live in are bent and broken. But what about the church? Surely in the church the reign of God is present. Yes, there is evidence of God's reign in the church for the church is, after all, the body of Christ, God's temple. But let's not make the mistake of simply equating the church with the kingdom of God. The church is also made up of sinful and flawed individuals, and although the church has a vital role to play in witnessing to and proclaiming the reign of God it is not nearly perfect.

Was the reign of God present in Jesus' ministry and does it continue to be evident today where the will of God is done, when forgiveness and justice prevail, where the gifts of healing of bodies, minds, relationships are restored? Yes, of course! God always has been at work in the world and was most fully in Jesus Christ; God is still at work in the world today. Precisely because God triumphed over the powers in Jesus' death and resurrection and showed them to be ultimately false and impotent, we can be signs of, pointers to, God's reign in the church and in our lives. But is the reign of God here in full? No, there is still too much sin and evil and despair in the world.

So, what are we to do, says Jesus? We are to pray for God's reign to be established: "your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven", says Matthew. **[15]** What does it mean for us to pray "your kingdom come"? Briefly, I'll highlight a few things:

**First**, we really are to pray, "Your kingdom come." We are to pray it with passion, with the expectation that God hears our prayers. As Paul says, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2) and "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17).

How might the world be changed if we prayed earnestly and unceasingly that God's reign of peace and justice, compassion and forgiveness be established in full? More importantly, how might we be changed if we took this prayer seriously?

**Second**, to pray “your kingdom come” means that we cultivate an openness both to seeing how God's reign is already evident in the world and to how we can participate in the work that God will yet do. How do we do that? Too often we think of prayer as words we offer to God. Sometimes we have a long list of things we think God needs to do for us. But prayer is also a time to be quiet and listen. Really listen. Do you pay attention to the sounds you hear throughout the day? In our culture people are very busy and often distracted by technology. Others are lost in their personal worries and anxieties. But all this busyness and anxiety means that we don't take time to listen to what's going on around us. I believe God is constantly trying to get our attention, telling us where God is active in the world, but we rarely hear God's voice over all the distractions and anxieties. It's hard to hear the voice of our Creator when we are never still or quiet. Spending time in silence will help us cultivate an openness to what God is doing.

This was the Pharisees problem. They were so busy trying to be perfect, casting their disapproving glances at everyone who weren't doing the things they approved of, condemning everything that didn't fit into their preconceptions of how God can act, that they missed God standing right in front of them. It matters how we look for the reign of God, hear where the reign of God is taking shape. Being open to God working in places and ways that we might not expect requires spending time in silence, listening and waiting for God to speak to us. God is active in many, many places, if we only have eyes to see and hearts to listen.

**Finally**, to pray “your kingdom come” means that we pray with hope and with patience. God is indeed a God who brings life out of death, who imagines new worlds out of nothing, who is able to do things far beyond our wildest dreams and hopes. One of our themes at FMC during the season of Advent was waiting in hope. I told the congregation a story about the time my spouse and I went to visit Europe back in 1988. As there was no way for us to visit every European country, we narrowed things down to small parts of England, Amsterdam, Paris, and Italy. Both of us wanted to visit Switzerland, Austria, and Germany—it was still East and West Germany back in 1988. We wanted to see the Berlin Wall. In the end we decided to save the Germanic countries for another trip.

A bit more than a year later, the Berlin Wall came down. It was an event that shook the world! When we heard about it, we were dumbfounded. You see, we just assumed the Cold War, the ideological battle between communism and capitalism, the fear between the West and Eastern Europe and Russia was the way the world worked. We assumed the world was fixed and closed. And would continue to operate that way.

Were we wrong!

What we didn't know, was there were some, like the St. Nikolai Evangelical Lutheran Church in East Germany, who imagined and hoped for a different world, a world not ruled by fear and weapons of mass destruction, but a world where God was at work



turning evil into good, despair into hope. Back in the early 1980s, Pastor Christian Fuhrer began holding weekly prayers for peace. Every Monday, the folks at St. Nikolai Evangelical Lutheran Church lit candles and recited the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount and prayed for peace.

Candles and prayer. Imagine that! The church got together, lit candles, read Matthew's beatitudes, and prayed for peace. God brought down the wall!

This kind of Christian hope requires patience. Jesus said that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, which is very small but grows quietly and slowly into a big bush, or like yeast that slowly and quietly works its influence through the whole mass of dough. Most of the time seed grows slowly and yeast works its way through a "humungous" pile of dough only gradually. Sometimes we can't even see the reign of God and we wonder whether God is doing anything. But we wait in hope with patience. And we live as followers of Jesus, opening ourselves to God using our efforts to be signs of God's reign. "Your kingdom come."