

The Lord's Prayer: Thy Kingdom Come
Mark 12:28-34
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In this morning's scripture reading, we find Jesus in the middle of a conversation with the Sadducees about religious matters. A scribe- a law professor with a PhD in the *torah*- who was observing the conversation, tested Jesus with a question about the most important of the 613 individual statutes found in the Old Testament. Jesus responded with what is known as the *shema*, taken from **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**; pious Jews still recite this verse every morning and evening: **"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."** (close slide) Then, Jesus linked with that another verse, this one from Leviticus 19:18 suggesting that the natural outflow of loving God is to love our neighbor as ourselves.

In the Gospel of Luke, this encounter describes the scribe responding to Jesus' answer by asking him who was his neighbor- and Jesus' response is the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In the Gospel of Mark, we find that the scribe is impressed by Jesus' response, and his comments underscore the significance of Jesus' teachings. Jesus' response is not the parable, but rather an affirmation; "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." The *Kingdom of God*- that should ring a few bells as we continue our reflection on the Lord's Prayer.

Not long ago, several of us watched a video of Pastor John Ortberg from the Menlo Park Presbyterian Church asking about what was the gospel- the good news- that Jesus

came to proclaim. In several places, we find Jesus opening his ministry with the proclamation that the Kingdom of God has arrived, and that good news; in the opening chapter of Mark's Gospel, Jesus proclaims- in a literal translation of the Greek: "The time has come near... the Kingdom of God is at hand;" both verbs are perfect past tense, indicating that something has happened and that its results continue. That's major theme throughout Jesus' ministry- that it has both happened and that it is continuing to happen. We find can find some reference to the "Kingdom of Heaven" mentioned directly or indirectly some 50 times in Matthew's Gospel alone. One of those times is in the phrase we want to focus on from the Lord's Prayer: "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

In his little video presentation, Ortberg made the point that Jesus didn't come to provide for us the right answers to get chosen ones into some exclusive country club in the sky. We can't find anywhere in the teachings of Jesus something that looks or sound like a secret code that we have to memorize and repeat back... sort of an "*open sesame*" allowing us entrance to heaven. There isn't some sort of verse we have to parrot back that provides for a the minimum entrance requirements to the Kingdom of God; rather, the good news is that the Kingdom of God had come to earth in the person of Jesus... and that as we live in relationship with Jesus, we discover that the Kingdom of God has both some present-tense implications for us, and some future-tense repercussions as well.

Ortberg does a good job of helping his listeners understand the implications of the term "*kingdom*," because the term isn't one we Americans use all that often. *Kingdom* is defined that that sphere of influence over which you or I have control, and its something we all learn to deal with from the very beginning... what is the favorite word of a two-

year-old? “No.” “Me.” Mine.” They’re kingdom-defining words; any parent with two kids in the backseat of a car knows that kids fight over their kingdom space all time: “Mom, he’s in my space, on my side of the car, breathing my air.” Of course, Mom thinks that car is her kingdom- and so she tells them to be quiet and behave, or else she’ll have to stop the car and come back there.... Ken Davis once observed that one of the best kingdom moves he knows of when driving down the road when the kids are misbehaving is that tap on the brake....!

Well, in the Lord’s Prayer, we have the kingdom language... “thy kingdom come, thy will be done;” and Jesus did come down here, seeking to share the Kingdom of God with those who are in relationship with him. Those who believe in Jesus become Kingdom bearers, invited by Jesus to help spread the good news of the Kingdom of God all over the place. Look around, and Lord knows... we need it!

(Miriam- if you can do it... slide with Kingdom of God phrase) How do you think things are going in the Kingdom of God? Pretty good....? (wait for it... then add line, with Kingdom of earth below it) How about on the Kingdom of Earth? Not so good...

One of the books I’ve been reading about the Lord’s Prayer is a wonderful collection of sermons by a World War II pastor named Helmut Thielicke- pastor of the Church of Hospitallers in Stuttgart, Germany. The sermons were preached to a remnant of his congregation worshiping in their bombed-out church; the church was conclusively destroyed by an allied bomb that interrupted Thielicke as he was preaching on the Lord’s Prayer: “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Thielicke knew that things weren’t

going so well on the Kingdom of earth; how about now...how do you think things are going these around here these days?

Let me return to the Lord's Prayer now... "thy kingdom come, thy will be done- on earth as it is in heaven." No wonder we pray that prayer... we long for the all that is scripture sketches out for us about the Kingdom of God: the lion lying down with the lamb; swords beaten into plowshares; a peace surpassing human understanding; the hungry fed, the blind given sight, prisoners set free from captivity, no more tears, no more cancer, no more heart disease- death itself destroyed! That's what Jesus came to proclaim... the Kingdom of God is at hand; it's happened, and it's still happening! No wonder it is such good news!

A lot of us think when we hear that- get me out of here so that I can go up there! Give me the magic code word, Jesus... help me to say or do the right thing so that like on *Star Trek*- "beam me up, Scotty!" But... that doesn't seem to be what Jesus is teaching. What he seems to be saying when he affirms that scribe... is more a sense of enabling what's up there... to come down here... the Kingdom of God on earth, as it is in heaven, and let it begin with me loving my neighbor as myself... "thy kingdom come, thy will be done- on earth as it is in heaven"--- starting with me.

Jesus didn't come to beam you out of your world into another dimension; he came that you might be transformed to world-changing salt and light in the environment you live in. Someday- all will be different, but until then- you and I are to be Kingdom bearers asked to help "up there" come "down here;" because, as Jesus once told his hearers- "... the Kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:21) The Kingdom of God is a

spiritual reality, and we're meant to flesh it out the way Jesus fleshed out the love of God for us all.

Those who believe in Jesus share in the Kingdom, and every time we pray the Lord's Prayer... "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"... we need to ask the missional question... how am I helping the Kingdom of God emerge here, in me and in the way I interact with those around me? (close slide of Kingdom over Kingdom)

One thing I can tell you is that as we gather around this table- it is a kingdom meal. We find Jesus often talking about banquets, and we can anticipate with great joy the event of sharing this meal with Jesus and all the saints- dead and alive- who believe in him and who are the spiritual children of God. For now, we consume by faith... and in doing so- we share in the timeless nature of God's love that extends into this moment, and touches this very table through the Holy Spirit, and so worship the love of God who makes it all possible... and then commit ourselves once again to do the best we can-with God's help- to love our neighbors as ourselves....thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen!