

Living from the Lord's Prayer, Pt. 2
Your Kingdom Come!
Isaiah 65: 17-25

**First Presbyterian Church
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I love the story of how George Frederick Handel wrote *The Messiah*. It poured through him in a matter of days. Day and night, he never left his room. When his housekeeper finally just came in with a tray of food, she found him weeping at his desk. He said, "I believe I did see heaven and the great God himself." I would not challenge him on that. The Hallelujah Chorus ushers us straight to the throne. I'm so glad it's a tradition to sing it here on Easter. Nearly every time I stand for it, I am moved by this phrase, "The kingdom of this world, become, the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ." That line is from Revelation 11: 15. It marks a transition in the music, what we would call in pop music a bridge. It marks the turning from hope to reality, from the darkness of the world's past to a present dawning of Christ's full reign. The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ. And he shall reign forever and ever. When I hear that sung, I feel hope again that the way the world is will not persist forever. God will set things right. His kingdom will come. Then I realize, in spite of my persistent selfishness, that Christ's Kingdom is what I long for most. A world where Christ rules in such a way that everything is ordered in joyful obedience to his will is the world that will be most fulfilling to our souls. I yearn for this rebellious, broken, enslaved human race to yield to the gracious King of kings.

In Jesus' day, the Roman Empire was the greatest kingdom the world had known. Rule of law, interconnecting roads, religious tolerance and strong security forces had brought a peace to daily life never before experienced. Yet getting the world right in these external terms did not overcome mankind's great enemies. Death still ended every life. Guilt still haunted every soul. Doubts plagued the heart concerning whether anyone above actually cared. People still broke faith and enacted horrible abuse against each other. The powerful still squashed the weak. No earthly kingdom can satisfy our deepest needs.

The people longed for the LORD I Am to show up in his world and reign. They prayed for God to exercise his power to subdue evil and make all things right. They knew the passage we read from Isaiah 65 and longed for it to become real. They prayed for the day to come. When the lion and the lamb would lie down

together. When no child would die in infancy. When a man would live to be a hundred as a matter of course. When you could work and see the fruit of your labor rewarded. You would harvest richly from fields you planted, without swindlers, tax men, and thieves taking your stuff. The streets would be peaceful, the wombs plentiful, the people healthy and the land fertile. The Kingdom of God was a vision of the world being made right.

Indeed, Jesus came to bring the Kingdom. In Mark's Gospel, the first words out of Jesus' mouth were about the kingdom. "The time is fulfilled," he said. "The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel." I'm here and so God's Kingdom is taking back the earth, one person at a time.

And Jesus did what he preached in his ministry. He ushered in the Kingdom of God. Jesus' ministry was an advance against the kingdom of darkness. He took on the classic enemies of the human race. Person by person, Jesus defeated the powers of sin, death and the devil. He called the compromised, stained tax collector named Levi to become his disciple. He forgave the woman caught in adultery. He forgave the paralytic for his sins even as he restored his mobility. Jesus raised a boy from the dead and restored him to his widowed mother. He drove out demonic spirits from the man named Legion, turning a raving, self-harming crazy into the man sitting at Jesus' feet, clothed and in his right mind. Wherever Jesus went, light advanced and darkness receded. He reclaimed territory for his Father. He beat back Satan. Jesus himself was the Kingdom of God in person. Wherever he went and whenever he spoke, God's rule and reign flowered and people flourished.

A lot of people, though, did not recognize that heaven's King had come to earth. I can't blame them. The expectation was that the King would come in a blaze of glory. He'd clean up the world with a mighty arm of strength. And do it all at once. Evil would be put down entirely. Justice would be enacted for all immediately. The earth would flourish. Death would die. People would be made right with God. All at once, in power and might and glory.

But that's not how he did it. Jesus turned all our expectations upside down. He compared the Kingdom to a mustard seed. It starts out tiny and grows slowly to become a huge plant. He compared the Kingdom to leaven in a lump of dough. It's just a little bit, and it has to be worked into the flour, then slowly, that little bit makes the whole loaf rise. He compared the Kingdom to a treasure hidden in a field overlooked by everyone. Until one guy discovers it and sells all he has to raise cash to buy the field with the secret treasure. It's worth everything though

most everyone thinks it's not worth anything. Jesus compared the Kingdom not to a mighty emperor but to a little child. He insisted that anyone who wanted to enter God's way had to become like a little child.

That image seems particularly potent for us. The disciples were arguing about which of them was going to be the greatest in the Kingdom of God. Jesus could be the King, but maybe that meant they could be princes and potentates. With patience, Jesus showed them a deeper truth. He found a child in the crowd and called him to stand front and center for all to see. "I tell you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven, let alone be great in it. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." You want to be great? Be like this. Like a child.

That would have been shocking to his hearers. The 1st century culture did not revolve around children and their activities. The goal of parents was not that their children should always have fun, always be celebrated and never know difficulty. No, life was about survival. Children were loved, but they also had to stay out of the way and learn to contribute as quickly as possible. They were easily overlooked in the pressure of working to make a living. They were not economically powerful, nor physically strong, nor socially dominant. They were little, vulnerable, and well aware that they were not to get in the way of what was important, the adult world of work, worship and survival.

What is it about children that Jesus prized? What child-like quality is necessary to entering the kingdom? Every week we invite the congregation to submit prayer requests. Unless the cards are marked confidential, we pray for the requests on these cards in worship, then again Sunday night at prayer meeting, then again on Tuesdays at both our elders meeting and our staff meeting. Many of the cards we get appear by the handwriting to be from children. I think that's wonderful, and I love that our children feel connected to our worship through asking for prayers. That's precious to us.

So last Tuesday we looked at this passage about children and the kingdom. We raised the question: what is childlike faith? Then I asked our staff to read aloud any prayer cards they thought might be from children. Now these cards were not confidential and we named no names. But we heard was astounding.

I pray for people who lost their homes and people who need help.
I hope everyone will have a great day.
For my mom's job interview to go well.

For my granddad to get out of cancer and heal fully.
I hope everyone has money and a house and hope.
That my baby brother doesn't cry when he goes to Sunday school.
That everyone will confess their sins every night.

Do we need any more definition of what it means to receive the Kingdom like a child? It means to see need and care for it and ask God to fix it. No filters. No qualifiers. To open yourself to disappointment because you just ask for what Love puts on your heart to ask. To just want the best for people. That everyone has a home, food and money. That people get jobs. That sick people get better. That sad people don't need to cry. That people confess their sins and find the forgiveness of Jesus. Pretty much, May Your Kingdom Come!

So Jesus taught his disciples that in God's Kingdom, the humility and openness and faith that is child-like in its simplicity and boldness is prized. Good lesson. But then he turned the whole thing missional. He told his disciples how to advance the kingdom of God. He said, "Whoever receives one such child in my name, receives me" (Mt. 18: 5).

Jesus the King of kings and Lord of lords had come into the world. He came humbly, going village to village and person to person. And he invited participation in his mission to advance the Kingdom of God against the kingdom of darkness, lostness and evil. Now when a king conquers new territory, he goes there. He goes to claim his land and be seen by his new people. The people have a choice. They can rebel against the new king and face the wrath of his army. Or they can receive the king. They can put out the welcome mat, dust off the local talent, share with him some of the local food, give him a fine place to stay and communicate in every way possible, "You may reign over us. We will serve you. Please protect us and bring peace." Jesus the King comes to claim new territory back from darkness. And he has a method for how to increase his people. When we receive the least and the lost, the broken and the wandering, we receive him. We accept his rule, his kingship and in that way we expand his kingdom.

This really is an astounding strategy. It's as if he says, "I am bringing the Kingdom of God further and further into the world. I want these rebel lands to welcome their true king. I want the world to receive my rule so all can be well. Now I want you to help me. But I don't need you to raise an army. I don't need you to persuade, cajole or force people. I need you to receive children and thereby receive me. You advance my rule when you gather in the overlooked, the less, the dispensable and the discardable. When you love with welcoming acceptance, you

bring in the kingdom, because you are receiving me into new territory. When you gather up those left for the trash heap, you create rich new lands in my kingdom. When you walk down mean streets and enter sharp places in my name, beholding the sorrow and responding in love, you expand my Kingdom.

I came to seek and to save the lost. I came for sinners. I came for the ill. I came for the broken. When you receive these in my name, you receive me and darkness recedes and the kingdom advances.

To pray, “Your Kingdom, let it come” is a life changing prayer. It means first that we recognize, this world is not all right. This right now is not the kingdom. I see suffering. I see brokenness. I see lostness and need and chaos and madness and violence. And it is not all right. It is not the way it should be. So I pray for the Kingdom to come. God bring your rule of peace and forgiveness and love and grace to this broken place. And suddenly I realize this prayer is involving my life. He sends me to the suffering ones, to receive them in his love as if I am receiving the King himself.

This week, you’ll read a quote by Tom Wright in which he describes how we begin to look at the world when we pray Your Kingdom Come. He likens it to looking through binoculars. When you look through a pair of binoculars, you are trying to see something more clearly. Both eyes look through magnifying lenses. But you have to adjust the binoculars to bring what you’re looking at into focus. So Wright tells us that this prayer helps us see the world with the binocular vision that God has. Through one lens, God sees the world in all its beauty. He created a wonderful world and he loves his creation. Through another lens, God sees the world in pain. Sin has marred the creation and it grieves our Creator. How does God focus the two lenses? How does he bring joy and sorrow, love and grief into focus? In Jesus. God focusses his view of the world until it comes clear in Jesus. The love and the grief, the joy and the sorrow clarify in Jesus. He took our griefs and carried our sorrows. He brought the love of God to bear on the brokenness and sin in the world. The clash between God’s love for his world and his outrage over our evil resolve on the cross of Christ.

When we pray for his Kingdom to come, we are praying “as Jesus was praying and acting, for the redemption of the world; for the radical defeat and uprooting of evil; and for heaven and earth to be married at last, for God to be all in all. And if we pray this way, we must of course be prepared to live this way.”¹ We look straight up at the pain and suffering in the world. We don’t turn away to avoid it. We don’t scorn it. We don’t shame it. We pray into it, “Your kingdom

come. Father, bring the love of Jesus here. Do it.” And then we remember, “Whoever receives one such as this receives me.” So we add, as St. Francis did, the words,

Oh Lord, make *me* an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

and where there is sadness, joy.

Your Kingdom, Jesus, let it come! Let it come now, let it come through us, let it come for the sake of the little ones you love so much.

¹N.T. Wright, *The Lord and His Prayer*, pp. 18-19.