

Second Sunday After Pentecost

The Lord's Prayer: Our Unity

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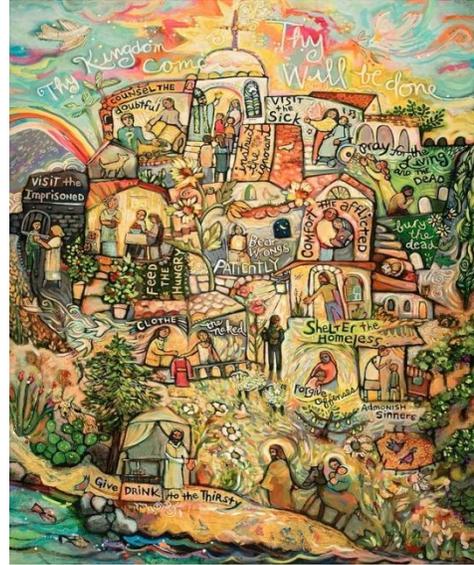
Daniel 2:44, 7:14

Mark 1:1-14

Luke 4:16-19

“Thy Kingdom Come”

Jesus preached two first sermons. Maybe it was just one, and two gospel writers remembered in different ways. Either way it's hard to overestimate the importance of his first recorded words to his followers. These ideas will frame everything else he says and does for the next three years. They also go to the heart of all his teachings: the idea of the Kingdom of God. Listen, first to Mark 1:14-15.



Thy Will Be Done: A Year in Mercy, by Jen Norton

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

And from Luke 4:

When [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

*'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'*

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together:

God, when we say, “your Kingdom come,” we remember that the pressure and chaos of our lives and our uncertainty about the future is not the final word. Though it doesn't always seem like it, you are in control and, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, you are active, working to make all things new. Help us to go into the future with expectant longing for what you have in store for us and for all creation. Amen.

On July 9, 1996 the Olympic Torch passed through our town on its way from Los Angeles to Atlanta. We were living in Southwest Florida at the time – not even a little bit on the way from Greece to my hometown. I scratched my head; it didn't make sense. Then I learned that one of my ministry colleagues, the director of our church's Early Childhood Center, had been chosen to be one of the runners to carry the torch in the relay. All my doubts and questions melted away.

Early that morning Tawes and I packed up the girls and headed to downtown Sarasota where the torch was scheduled to pass along Bayfront Park, then travel through downtown, moving hand to hand until eventually it made its way to Atlanta, and into the trembling hands of none other than Mohammed Ali. Sarah, our younger daughter, age 7, spent the first five years of her life as a student at the Early Childhood Center. She bubbled with excitement on her perch atop her dad's shoulders, waiting... watching for that moment when "Miss Sue" would receive the famous light. And then she had it in her hands. Sue began on her quarter-mile race of glory. In seconds it was over. But the memory of that moment lingered. We'd glimpsed the glory; we'd seen the flame. In a culture where sports are king and many people's ultimate loyalty, it was a red letter day for Sarasota County, our family, and our church.

Now I know it's not a perfect metaphor. (None of them are.) The Olympic flame is not the Kingdom of God, not even close. The flame does have some things in common with Jesus' favorite topic, the Kingdom of God, and today's portion of The Lord's Prayer, *Thy Kingdom come*. One of those similarities is its three-fold aspect. The flame, like the Kingdom of God, exists in three tenses: past, present and future. The Kingdom Jesus came to declare has been, and is, and is yet to be. The Kingdom is already, and not yet, and it is transforming. Glimpsing the Kingdom, even for a moment will change your life. Living the Kingdom – will change the world!

First let's look at the three tenses:

Knowledge of God's Kingdom has been around since the world began; 13 billion years ago God created the universe and made our early ancestors aware – at least at some level – of God's presence and dominion in all creation. So the ancient psalmist could sing: *O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.*ⁱ

Through the centuries and in various ways, the Kingdom of God has shown like an eternal fire -- when God delivered Israel out of slavery in Egypt, overcoming the most powerful empire on earth, and when God led the Israelites through the wilderness with a cloud and a pillar of flame. God established earthly kings, who ruled imperfectly most of the time; even then, God continued to speak through the prophets, revealing God's requirements of compassion and justice.

Through it all, at certain moments and at various ways in the past, God's people glimpsed the Kingdom of God. Those moments were brief, but they were real.

Then, in what Paul called *the fullness of time*, God came near. God was born in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and the world saw for the first time what true kingship looks like. It was startling, and sometimes confusing, but the flame of God's presence, compassion, and power burned brightly, more brightly in Jesus than in anyone or anything the world had ever known.

When evil tried everything to put it out, evil failed absolutely. Jesus returned from the grave in victory! And before he ascended to the Father, he shared a measure of his Spirit with those he left behind. It's the same spirit that we now pass from hand to hand, from generation to generation in baptism, and in the laying on of hands.

Today, we still see glimpses of his Kingdom – like a flame passing by – we experience breaking into the Kingdom when we hear the word of God and turn our lives around. Jesus called that “repentance.” The Kingdom of God enters our world when people believe and live his gospel! We get to glimpse the Kingdom of God:

when the poor hear good news,
when those who were captive go free,
when the spiritually blind receive new “sight,”
when oppressed populations and threatened species are finally able to thrive, and
when God’s jubilee is announced to the whole world.

We glimpse the Kingdom of God today. The Kingdom of God has an aspect of the past but it never remains there. The Kingdom of God is within you and among you. Jesus said that. For example: 174 of our teens and their advisors are in Carneys Point, NJ today building the Kingdom. They will complete, or nearly complete, three houses that low-income families will be able to buy at no interest. The Kingdom of God is active and present; it’s here, but it is also yet to be complete.

There are still refugees. Gun violence continues to plague God’s kingdom; there is hunger, despair, and addiction.

The Kingdom of God is like a light we can see far off in the darkness; it is already, and not yet. It also has a future aspect the poet Ann Weems described when she wrote:

“I keep reaching...
Thinking one God’s morning ...
I will wake [and]...
The hungry will be fed,
The dying held,
The maimed walking,
The angry stroked,
The violent calmed
The oppressed freed
The oppressors changed
And every tear wiped away.” ii

That’s the vision. The prophet Daniel had it too. He could see the Kingdom of God as a time in the future when God will *receive all authority, glory, and sovereign power*...and there will be no question as to who is our king. There will be no issue about how people are treated at the border because there will be no borders, *all nations and peoples of every language will worship God, and his dominion of compassion and peace will last forever.*

Lean into it. Paul said that *the one who began a good work in you will bring it to completion in the day of Jesus Christ...* Philippians 1:6. The reign of God has begun, but now it is incomplete, fragmented. You and I don't have the power to bring in the Kingdom, but we can declare Christ as our king today. We can live as if the Kingdom of God were already here. *Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

A Methodist minister named Wiley Stevens put it this way:

“The challenge of the Kingdom for each of us is:

To let God be God...in you

To let God be God...in the church

To let God be God...in your neighborhood

To let God be God...in your job, in your family, and in your world.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Are you sure that's what you want to pray? Because if you genuinely pray that way, it will change you – it will change everything! It will change the way you handle your money. If you sincerely pray “in the God's Kingdom come way,” you may find yourself forgiving people who have wronged you. You'll be getting into something gigantic that transforms lives and society.

It's not just words – it's lives.

When you sincerely pray *Thy Kingdom come*, you will find that you are less concerned about yourself and your own needs and future, and more involved in your community and church. If you are going to pray *Thy Kingdom come*, and mean it -- you may find yourself rearranging your schedule so that you can spend more time caring for your neighbors, loving your family, and worshiping your God.

Pray *Thy Kingdom come*, and you'll need to get ready for that prayer to be answered, because I'm telling you, it's going to change the way you work, and how you play your game.

There's a great example from history. Do you know the name Eric Liddell? Nicknamed the “The Flying Scotsman,” Liddell was a Christian missionary in China and an astonishingly gifted athlete. He took the bronze medal in the 200 meter race at the Paris Olympics in 1924; but when he learned that the heats for the 100, his event, were to be held on Sunday, he refused to compete, because of his commitment to keeping the Sabbath. Liddell's faith and his conviction made news around the world. The whole true story is depicted in the film, *Chariots of Fire*. It won the Academy Award for Best Picture, and it was.

In this scene, Liddell has just learned that another UK teammate, Lord Andrew Lindsay had offered Liddell his place in the 400 meters. Watch:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPB7r0UpNIE&list=RDGPB7r0UpNIE&start_radio=1

How about you? Do you believe that God's Kingdom is near? You pray for it. Some of you pray it every day. Are you willing to stake your game on it? How about your life?

To pray *Thy Kingdom come* is to align ourselves with his movement, his goals. To pray *Thy Kingdom come* is to live, not for yourself, but for his glory. *Thy Kingdom come* means my Kingdom go. All in?

ⁱ Psalm 8:1

ⁱⁱ Ann Weems, *Reaching for Rainbows*, Westminster John Knox, 15

ⁱⁱⁱ Wiley Stephens, "Thanksgiving in Three Tenses" *Day1* radio broadcast, first aired November 23, 2003