

**Lenten Service  
March 20, 2019**

**“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it in heaven.”**

**Sermon Preached by Pastor Gary Garvey  
American Lutheran Church of Sun City**

Hello. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus who is the Christ. Amen and Amen.

The coming kingdom . . . my goodness. We have a couple of kingdoms I think about. One is the one above and the one that's in the here and now. And it's an amazing here and now because God has given us his word and in that word we have some guidance and some mentorship, and we can look to it. And it shapes our character and helps us to be better; helps us to raise our families and to mentor and to be an example to others, most of the time. The kingdom above and the kingdom here and now – I like to think in terms of quality of life, and quality of life is so important. Life here and the life after life is so very important. And, of course, there's that business of mortality. Not to dwell on war, but I went to Vietnam at the age of 22, and there was enough drama there at that time that I had to learn that I wasn't invincible. I had a shelf life, and one day that shelf life would expire. Most of us do; everyone does. We are given the kingdom and called to make the best of it.

For 6 American Lutheran Church members, I have had the privilege of being with them when that convergence of the kingdom happened to them, when the here and now changed to the life above. There are 4 clergy on this staff, so since the first of the year, we've seen that occur in some 20 people or so. Of course it makes sense. I've lost grandparents, great-grandparents; so have you. Parents, those above us. And then we realize that layer of ether that separates us from the heavenlies is getting thinner and thinner. There is no more buffer. We're it. There's nobody else we can call up, and if you have that, God bless you. That's a wonderful thing. I miss it. I wish my dad and my mom were still around to be at the other end of the phone, but such is the way of things. We are not invincible, are we? We have a shelf life.

In 1979, I was a student of CPE. We call it CPE; it's really clinical pastoral education. And I was at the great Bethesda Hospital in St. Paul, Minnesota. My responsibilities there were pastoral care to hospice patients, 19 terminally ill in-patients. Many had developed in life as Christians, and others not so much. The Christians were better to reconcile their upcoming destinies. I remember being told back then that I had a messianic complex, meaning I cared too much. I would go to the hospital at all hours of the day and night, and I'd hang with the families, and I'd pray with the patients, and I'd spend time with them. My supervisor, and my verbatims, would read those things, and he'd say, “You need to work through some of this over-caring.” I knew the families, and I had become a visitor. I remember one of those people in particular. His name was Dutch; that was his nickname. I couldn't even tell you what his name was. He was a salesman, over the road. Then one day I went in and I prayed with him, and he said, “Could you come back after hours, 'cause I would like to have confession with you, and I'd like to share something that's been tormenting me for so many years? I said, “Well, of course. I will come back.” He wanted to meet confidentially to tell me about the days, his drinking days' sins. He said he had gotten consumed one night with alcohol and while he was driving home he had hit and run a child. And he went home and parked his car and never said a thing. He had gotten drunk one night and taken a life. What a terrible thing. His conscious had rode him hard the rest of his life. And he'd never told anybody about this story, that he told me, 40 years ago. Could God forgive such a thing? I wasn't sure I could. But that was the story, and we prayed. We prayed for that forgiveness. We prayed. It was an important thing to do.

We prayed a lot with 19 terminal hospice patients. It's good to take care of unfinished business. I may be the only one here in the family that has unfinished business, of course, but sometimes that happens, and sometimes it's so good to go and maybe do the spring cleaning – clean out the soul a little bit – go out and try and fix some of those broken places and bridge the gap and bring about healing in situations that need to be cared for. Unfinished business. I remember a Promise Keepers' meeting in Boulder, Colorado. I used to go those, used take a lot of my families at the base, and we'd go up to Promise Keepers and listen to them talk about “turn your hearts toward home; care more for your families; be better about the family, be better about the children, turn your heart towards home.” And I remember going up there and I heard the great Reverend Doctor Howard Hendricks preaching on kingdom loyalty. He opened his message with a message prop saying, “I blew out my aorta on the way to Sarasota.” Now, what that means to me is that a lot of people spend so much time at work, so much time away from family, so much time away from mentoring the children because there's so many things that can be

accomplished at work. For example, you can retire early, or you can build up a nest egg, or you can have a great big house, and you can have a lot of stuff in the house, and then, when you retire early, you can go to Sarasota. Of course, we know now about Sun City. But, back at the sermon point, it was Sarasota, and so it goes. I blew out my aorta to Sarasota.

Unfortunately, when folks finally have time to enjoy the kingdom, there may also be health issues. We know they really wanted to be here. But here I happened to notice that those ambulances are really getting a workout around here. Gosh, I tell you what, when you're driving to work you hear the ambulance going this direction, going that direction, and somebody is going to the hospital for a fix. And it's just such an amazing thing that when you get to be a certain place in life, there seems to be more maintenance involved. You gotta fix this and you gotta fix that. You get to know your doctor just a little bit better, don't ya? Well, that's kind of a crazy thing.

I was reading on Denzel Washington, who is one of my favorite actors, and he was recorded to say, "I have been fortunate to make millions and millions of dollars and still you cannot take it with you. You will never see a bumper hitch and a U-Haul on the back of a hearse, because you can't take it with you." Whether it was in a war zone or a hospital, I've never heard a dying person say, at that point, at that time in life, "Gosh, I just wish I had worked harder and had a bigger house." "I just wish I'd racked up more in the bank account." or "I wish I had had more time shares or vacation properties or more stuff." You'll never hear a dying person say such things. At that moment, clarity is clear. At that moment, kingdoms are converging, and they know some things and they're wishing they had some more time so that they could fix some things with the family and their loved ones that need to be touched and need to be fixed, because the kingdoms are converging.

And we have a beautiful kingdom in the here and now: a Lord who loves us and walks with us and talks with us like a brother, gives us mentorship and helps us make a better day out of a normal day. It's a wonderful God that we believe and that we love, the God above. Kingdoms converging and coming together. Dutch prayed God's forgiveness, that he wished he had spent more time not drinking so much, not wasting so much time, not being so far away from the family, more time with the wife, the children, and God. Gosh, a guy that had those kind of problems sounds like a lot of the guys that didn't have those kind of problems at all - just wishing they had prioritized their time even better. And then he was gone to be with the Lord, I pray.

Those kingdoms converge, and we've been blessed with a good one. We gather together, and we have the freedom of religion. The people of Christ Jesus gather in this place, and we celebrate, we prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of Jesus and the way of Maundy Thursday Communion and death on Friday, and then a glorious resurrection that reminds us that life is a life eternal. And we believe in an infinite God, and he's here to mold us and mentor us and be with us now and in the converging kingdoms in which we live. I ask God's blessing upon you and upon all of us, always, as we rock and roll through this Lenten season. Amen? And Amen.

Now the peace of God that surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds on Christ Jesus. Amen.