

**Davidson College Presbyterian Church**  
**Davidson, North Carolina**  
**Lib McGregor Simmons, Pastor**  
**“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”**  
**Isaiah 11:6-9; Matthew 6:9-13**  
**Second Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**January 17, 2010**

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

We pray these words from the Lord’s Prayer every Sunday. Today we pray these words with the wrenching images of Haitian suffering searing our mind’s eye. And, oh, what images of suffering. Today, it is the same, and it is also different. Today, we have prayed “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” with Manny Rashat / Mary Muchane in his/her native language. Were it not for the journalists making such a strong witness on our behalf to what is happening, we could not even come close to imagining it, I think. And as one of them, the usually jolly Al Roker, said in a subdued voice after returning to the “Today” show from Port-au-Prince on Friday, “[even] the pictures almost can’t convey what is going on down there.” (1)

Today we pray for God’s kingdom to come and for God’s will to be done in Haiti, as it is in heaven.

We are praying for God’s will to be done and, among the talk that has saturated the air waves these last few days, there have been some references to comments made by Pat Robertson (2) about what God’s will is and has been regarding Haiti. I don’t know that I would have acknowledged his comments at all in this sermon, but on Thursday night when I met with the choir as I customarily do to pray with them in preparation for the Sunday service, one of the choir members asked me to respond to his comments. And so I will respond simply by making reference to an article written by University of Wisconsin professor Deborah Blum because I think that what she writes might come in handy for some of you if you are asked to comment on Pat Robertson’s remarks or any occasion where someone deigns to declare what God’s will is when natural disaster occurs.

Professor Blum has written about attending a meeting of seismologists where the organizers had strung a banner across the front of the conference room. The banner bore a quotation attributed to the historian Will Durant, “Civilization exists by geological consent, subject to change without notice.” Durant, she wrote, came back to this point in writing with his wife Ariel in *The Lessons of History*, “to the geologic eye, all the surface of the earth is a fluid form, and [people move] upon it as insecurely as Peter walking on the waves to Christ.” (3)

The Durants’ wrote from a historian’s point of view, but their comments are very much in keeping with biblical theology, I believe. They are a rebuttal to human hubris, hubris which assumes that *we* are the lords of the universe, that *we* are the controllers of all natural forces, that *we* are the declarers of what is and is not “cursed.”

In scripture, however, we are given to see that we are not the lords of the universe. We are not the controllers of all natural forces. We are none of these, and so we pray to God, “Thy [not my] kingdom come, thy [not our] will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

When we pray for God’s kingdom to come on earth as it is heaven, we are praying about as radical a prayer as there can be. Heaven is that ideal way of being where everything is as God intends it to be. It is the reality where, as Paul writes and we affirmed in our Call to Worship this morning, “there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female” (Galatians 3: 28), and as Isaiah put it, “the wolf shall live with the lamb, and the cows and the bears shall graze together, and a little child shall lead them.” (Isaiah 11:6ff.)

This is not the way that Haiti looks right now. Haiti does not fit anyone’s image of heaven. And truthfully, Haiti did not look like heaven on the Tuesday before the earth shook and Port-au-Prince was reduced to rubble. In Bob Herbert’s op-ed piece which appeared in yesterday’s *New York Times*, he wrote, “In Haiti, the apocalypse wears the trappings of the norm. It’s a place where heartbreak never seems to end.” And then he went on to recount an incident which occurred many years ago when he was on assignment in the country. “A man took me to the back of a pickup truck and pointed to his two small children. It was obvious they were ill. Both were shivering, although the evening was quite warm. The man pleaded with me to take the youngsters and smuggle them into the United States. ‘They will die here,’ he said, whereas in America they would be safe and ‘grow strong.’ I tried to explain why that was impossible, that I could not take the children. The man listened politely, then quietly said thank you, and with an expression of the deepest despair climbed into the cab of his truck and drove off.” (4)

We pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, in Haiti as in heaven.” In teaching us so to pray, Jesus gives us two images to hold alongside one another, the Haiti that now is and the heaven that God intends Haiti to be.

Of course, we are already seeing glimpses of that heaven right now. We have seen glimpses of heaven on earth in joyous reunions of parents and children, in the news that Anna Butt, the granddaughter of Pat and Bob, is alive, in medical personnel and rescue teams working around the clock, in the generous gifts of money and offers to help. Those of us who were in the DCPC parlor on Friday morning got a glimpse of heaven there as thoughtful and creative ideas were shared among folks from various communities of faith regarding how to respond to this crisis in the short term and in the long term.

In the short term, we encourage you to contribute to one of the many established humanitarian programs in Haiti or to write a check to DCPC marked “Haiti” on the memo line which will combine with other contributions from this congregation to be sent to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance or to go to the PDA website which was noted in “This Week at DCPC” in order to contribute directly. Also in the short term, we’ll be gathering as a larger community on the afternoon of January 31, two Sundays from today. As a community not separated by barriers of religion and race, we’ll work together in assembling meals through Stop Hunger Now. As a community not separated by barriers of race and religion, we’ll become better educated on the history and background and poverty and faith and resilience of the Haitian people. As a community not separated by barriers of race and religion, we’ll culminate our afternoon together

by gathering together in an interfaith service to sing and pray and dedicate an offering which will be received at that service and divided equally between the American Red Cross for shorter term needs and Habitat for Humanity for longer term needs.

This is for the short term. What we do for the long term still rests in the heart and mind of God, beyond our knowing. However, all along the way, we will not be weary in praying the Lord's Prayer for it is a prayer that gathers us up in the long view. It is a prayer that sweeps us up together into a future where earth will be as heaven, where there will be no distinction between rich and poor, black and brown and white, citizens of developing and developed nations, powerful and powerless, for such categories as these, by the grace and mercy of our loving God, no longer exist. It is toward that future that we pray and serve and share today and every day as Jesus taught, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

1. Alessandra Stanley, "Haiti Broadcast Coverage: Compassion and Self-Congratulation," *The New York Times*, January 16, 2010.
2. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5TE99sAbwM>
3. Deborah Blum, "Civilization on a Fault Line," *The New York Times*, January 15, 2010.
4. Bob Herbert, "Resolve Among the Ruins," *The New York Times*, January 16, 2010.

