

Davidson College Presbyterian Church
Davidson, North Carolina
Rev. Bill Tiemann
“The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory”
I Chronicles 29:10-13, Luke 9:28-36
Transfiguration of the Lord
February 14, 2010

Whenever I go home to visit my family in Texas, and stay over Sunday, we go to church together at St. James Catholic Church in Seguin. We go there because years ago my sister married a Catholic—a handsome young Air Force pilot from nearby Randolph Field. By agreement required then, their children had to be raised as Catholics, and now, all their grandchildren have been, too. The words of their mass are not all that different from some of the words in our service, but when it comes time to say the Lord’s Prayer, they stop after “lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil”—and I just keep on saying, without thinking, “for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.” And they kind of look at me funny and wonder why I can’t read the missal text right in front of me.

The Catholics are right; Matthew doesn’t include these words, and the earliest manuscripts of Matthew don’t have them. But very soon they appear in later New Testament manuscripts, and also in the *Didache*, an anonymous Christian writing called *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, dating from the first years of the second century. Only the *Didache*, after quoting the first part of the Lord’s Prayer as we know it, leaves out the word kingdom, and simply writes: “for yours are the power and the glory, forever. Amen.” And it goes on to say that Christians should pray this prayer three times a day. Not a bad idea. (1)

What’s going on here? Well, scholars tell us that these early Christians, being also observant Jews, knew that the prayers in the synagogue almost always ended with some ascription of praise to God. So, it seemed to them kind of abrupt to end this prayer that Jesus taught them without adding words of praise, also. So, probably by the end of the first century, these last words were included, and we have said them ever since.

Maybe they were inspired by the prayer of David, which was read earlier from I Chronicles. Or maybe the early Christians composed them on their own. Most likely, they were not the same in every place. But some such words as these were the concluding words they used in this most familiar of all prayers.

Karl Barth in his lectures on the Lord’s Prayer calls them the “Doxology” and says that they really relate to the sixth petition Lib discussed last week: “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.” Because, Barth says, the kingdom and the power and the glory belong to God and not to the Devil, sin, death, or hell. Or, putting it another way, they show us that God is the king, powerful and glorious, by delivering us from the Evil One. (2)

So you can take your choice about the origin of these words. Maybe they are simply an ascription of praise to God, following the practice of Jewish synagogue prayers. Or maybe they were meant to complete that last request to be delivered from the power of the Evil One. Either way, we would feel today the prayer is incomplete without repeating them.

And by the way, I will not try to determine who's right about the ending—the Lutherans, Episcopalians and Methodists, who say: “Forever and ever. Amen.” Or we dour Presbyterians who simply say: “Forever, Amen.” Obviously, we are not ones to waste words, even for the sake of keeping the cadence of English speech.

But what are we really saying when we repeat these much too familiar words, usually by rote, we have to admit: “For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.” Consider that first word: “kingdom.”

Once again, the scholars tell us it would be better if we said kingship instead of kingdom. To say: “yours is the kingship” is an act of submission to God, that we are God's subjects, pledging our obedience and allegiance to him, and not to anyone else.

One of those anonymous students in the Thursday night sermon evaluation and planning group says the most important word here is “is”. “Yours is the kingship,” not “yours was the kingship,” not “shall be the kingship,” but “is now the kingship”—in these years right now. Think about that. In the midst of all the kings and dictators and prime ministers and presidents of this world, God is still in charge. In these uncertain times, difficult for so many of us, it helps to be reminded of that.

Yours is the kingship “and the power.” Power is a provocative word. The Greek word is *dunamis* from which we get our word dynamo—an engine which produces power. Or our word dynamite, a powerful explosive. To affirm that God is *dunamis* is to say that God has the power to accomplish whatever we ask for: daily bread, forgiveness, deliverance from evil. God's power is what makes this prayer more than mere wishes thrown in the air; *dunamis* assures us that God can do what we ask for. (3)

Yours is the kingship and the power “and the glory.” We often talk about glory in human terms, like some celebrity in the spotlight at the Grammy's, or some athlete being honored, like Tyler Hansbrough last Wednesday night, for four years of outstanding play at Carolina basketball.

But glory belongs to God, not to us. We live in the presence of divine glory. We have no idea really what it's all about-- only hints, like a glorious sunset or a clear, night sky in the West. But to end the prayer with: “thine is the glory,” says William Barkley, is to remember that “this earth is penetrated and permeated by divine glory”—that there is a splendor out there that we both see and don't see and maybe never will see completely until after death, but its there. And we call it the glory of God. (4)

It just so happens that today is Transfiguration Sunday. You heard the story. Jesus and Peter and James and John go up to a high mountain and in the swirling mist around the top they see Jesus transfigured, with Moses and Elijah standing with him. His glory is so bright it hurts their eyes. It's a mystical experience of the first order. The disciples want to hang around up there for a while. But Jesus will have none of it. There is healing work to do at the foot of the mountain and they need to get on with it. But this whole story gives us some hint again of what we are talking about when we say: "thine is the GLORY!"

Maybe one way of understanding these last words of the prayer is to call them a necessary footnote. We live in an academic community and we know what footnotes are all about. They enlighten, they elaborate on, they document, they reference the written text. They are a way of proving its veracity. That's what these words do for the Lord's Prayer. They give us the assurance that there is good reason to offer those petitions for daily bread, and forgiveness, and deliverance from evil. Why? Because God's is the kingdom and power and glory, and can make all this happen.

Or, to put it another way, these words are like the Hallelujah Chorus at the end of the Christmas section of Handel's Messiah. After all that God has accomplished in the birth of Christ, our only response can be praise: "Hallelujah, Hallelujah: And he shall reign forever and ever." Or, in this case, "for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever." Hallelujah!

But two writers, who were both then at Duke, Will Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, tell us we miss the point of these last words if we don't see their political implications. (5) And I'm not talking here about the politics of Democrats and Republicans. I'm talking about the politics of God.

They remind us of the familiar radical political words of Mary in the Magnificat: "God has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty." (6) Mary is talking about a political God who turns the world upside down.

And here, in this prayer, and especially in these final words, we have this same conviction of the early church that there is no Caesar but God, and only God can give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, and keep us from the powers of the evil ones in this world. That's politics—to affirm who really is king, who really has the power, to whom really belongs the glory. We could hardly pray a prayer more radical than this one, which we say every Sunday and don't even realize how radical the words really are.

In the early part of the 20th century, no theologian was more influential than Walter Rauschenbusch, the prophet of the Social Gospel. One hundred years ago, in 1910, he published a little book called: *Prayers of the Social Awakening*. (7) He begins it with a consideration of the Lord's Prayer as the great prayer of social awakening. Let me

quote his last two paragraphs about the prayer, changing nothing except his lack of inclusive language: He writes: “Thus the Lord’s Prayer is the great prayer of social Christianity. It is charged with what we call ‘social consciousness.’ It assumes the social solidarity of humankind as a matter of course. It recognizes the social basis of all moral and religious life even in the most intimate personal relations to God.

“It is not the property of those whose chief religious aim is to pass through an evil world in safety, leaving the world’s evil unshaken. Its dominating thought is the moral and religious transformation of humankind in all its social relations. It was left us by Jesus, the great initiator of the Christian revolution; and it is the rightful property of those who follow his banner in the conquest of the world.” If we really hear Rauschenbusch that this prayer is meant for the moral and religious transformation of humankind I wonder if we can ever pray this prayer the same way again.

One last thought. Today is Valentine’s Day. When I reminded our study group of that, they said: “Don’t touch it!” Well, let me touch it lightly. Maybe we could say that these last words of the prayer—“For yours is the kingship and the power and the glory”—that these words are a kind of Valentine to God, our love note acknowledging God’s overwhelming and unconditional love for us. Is that farfetched? Maybe so, but perhaps, on this one day, it works.

That’s the good news for DCPC this Sunday morning!

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1. Didache 8:2-3, translation from *Early Christian Fathers*, Vol. 1, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press (1953), p. 174
 2. Karl Barth, *Prayer*, trans. Sara F. Terrien, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press (1952), pp. 77-78
 3. William Barkley, *The Lord’s Prayer*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press (1998), p. 112
 4. Ibid.
 5. William H. Willimon & Stanley Hauerwas, *Lord, Teach Us: The Lord’s Prayer and the Christian Life*, Nashville: Abingdon Press (1996), pp. 96-98
 6. Luke 1:51-53 (NRSV translation)
 7. Walter Rauschenbusch, *Prayers of the Social Awakening*, Boston: The Pilgrim Press (1910), p. 23