

Davidson College Presbyterian Church  
**"Hallowed Be Your Name; Your Kingdom Come"**  
 Matthew 6:5-13; Matthew 13:31-33; 42-52  
 March 10, 2019  
 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent  
 Rev. Dr. Scott M. Kenefake

***Prayer for Illumination***

***Our Father, our Mother, the one who birthed us, the Holy One, send your Spirit to open our minds now. Open our ears to hear the words of others and to discern your word. We ask this in the name of the One who taught us how to pray, Jesus the Christ. Amen.***

**Matthew 6:5-13**

<sup>5</sup>"And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.<sup>6</sup>But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. <sup>7</sup>"When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup>Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

<sup>9</sup>"Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.<sup>10</sup>Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.<sup>11</sup>Give us this day our daily bread. <sup>12</sup>And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup>And do not bring us to the time of trial but rescue us from the evil one. (*Anthem*)

**Matthew 13:31-33; 44-48, 51**

<sup>31</sup>He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; <sup>32</sup>it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." <sup>33</sup>He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

<sup>44</sup>"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. <sup>45</sup>"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; <sup>46</sup>on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. <sup>47</sup>"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; <sup>48</sup>when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. <sup>51</sup>"Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes."

Situated at the top of the Mount of Olives, [overlooking Jerusalem from the east], the *Church of the Pater Noster* is (according to church tradition) the site where Jesus taught *the Lord's Prayer* to the disciples. The church has a walled garden and these stone walls feature *ceramic plaques* with the Lord's Prayer in many different languages. In fact, on the church website you will find the Lord's Prayer in *1,441 languages and dialects*.

Most of us probably can't remember the first time we *heard* the Lord's Prayer—or the *Our Father*, as many call it. That's because this prayer seems to be almost everyone's possession. Even in this time of increasing secularism, the Lord's Prayer is still part of the common possession of several billion people.

And for many of us, not only can't we remember when we first heard this prayer, neither can we remember when we *memorized* it—because our memorizing was not a conscious effort; it was simply the process of hearing the words until they were part of our very persons.

But these few words (only 58) may be the most familiar collection of words on the planet. They have been translated into roughly *two thousand languages and dialects*, including those for probably 98 percent of the world's inhabitants.

On any given weekend they will be spoken in unison in massive cathedral-like buildings and in mud huts and in open fields of worshipers.

And every priest or pastor knows—as does many a nurse or hospice caregiver—that this prayer is often one of the *last statements* made by those who are dying. All of which is to say that there is no prayer—indeed, no single collection of words—that can be rightly compared to this one.

So let's take a closer look at it to see what we can discover about it.

You see, a great many prayers begin with the word *give*. But this isn't where the Lord's Prayer begins. Methodist theologian, *Ellsworth Kalas*, said, "*I always asked my seventh-grade students if they prayed, and then I asked how often they prayed. I still remember the boy who answered, 'Whenever I need something.' It wasn't the answer I wanted (said Kalas), but I was grateful for its honesty, and I recognized that this boy was probably describing the prayer philosophy of a majority of people.*"

Instead, the Lord's Prayer begins with a *relationship*; "*Our Father.*" Everything that follows in this prayer derives its understanding, its strength, its hope, and its responsibility from this relationship. In prayer—as with all the other major issues of life—ranging from family to international affairs, the foundational issue is *relationship*.

Jesus wanted us to know, above all else, that you and I are sons and daughters of God—and what we *call* God indicates what God means to us.

Of course, the term of address in this prayer—*Father*—is for some an insuperable barrier. I have known people who wait until this word is past before they join in the congregational speaking of this prayer. For many, this word is painful due to the *absence, neglect, or abuse* carried out by their own fathers.

But Jesus had a very different *parenting relationship* in mind. Think of Jesus' story of a man who had two sons. The younger asked for an early distribution of the estate so he could enjoy his inheritance—a quite unthinkable attitude in any generation but especially in the ancient world, because it was tantamount to telling a father that he couldn't wait for him to die!

Nevertheless, the father generously agreed to the request. The young man soon wasted this inheritance, leaving himself absolutely penniless. Yet when he returned home to ask *forgiveness*, the father welcomed him with a grand celebration. The older brother found no joy in his sibling's return. He complained that his father had never done anything special for him (though of course he had received his share of the estate), and the father responded to the older brother's unpleasantness by saying, "*Don't be unhappy, you can have a party anytime you want it.*"

Jesus said that God was that kind of father, a father who *gave generously* and *forgave extravagantly*, showing an astonishing measure of *patience* and *mercy*. This is the kind of picture we're supposed to keep in mind when we pray, "*Our Father ...*").

But something more must be said. This prayer does, indeed, begin with a relationship, but if we stop with *Our Father*, we haven't captured the whole of the relationship. Yes, God is to be understood as our *loving parent*, but one whose dwelling place is *heaven*. In other words, this name is to be spoken with accents of *reverence* and *awe*, because this name is *hallowed*.

Over the centuries theologians have argued about the *immanence* and the *transcendence* of God. Some emphasize that God is infinitely immanent, *as close as the air we breathe*, while others remind us that God is utterly *transcendent*, so much so as to be quite beyond our grasp.

This prayer, however, in its opening phrases, gives us a *living answer*. The immanence and the transcendence of God are *equally true* and *equally important*, each so true that their concepts must be blended *in one breath*.

Which leads us to ... *the Kingdom*. But what kind of kingdom is it?

Jesus taught about it in parables, those tantalizing stories that reveal by concealment. Matthew 13 is a collection of Jesus' parables of the kingdom. He says that the kingdom of heaven can be compared to ... *someone who sowed good seed in his field ... like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field ... like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour ... like treasure hidden in a field ... like a merchant in search of fine pearls ... (and) like a net that was thrown into the sea.*"

You see, by using parables, Jesus provided *indirect descriptions* rather than a *blueprint* of the kingdom. But let's be clear—"God's intentions for us are quite plain. For example, in Micah 6:8 we are told what is required of us: "... to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God."

Nothing could be plainer than that! At the minimum, *justice* means a fair and sustaining share of the world's resources for every man, woman, and child. It means the granting of basic liberties to all, of whatever race, creed, or status. It means a level playing field of opportunity. At the minimum kindness means care for the sick, the aged, and the severely handicapped. It means material and moral support for the widow, the alien, and the orphan. It means comfort for the grieving and the distressed. And to walk humbly with God means to *know from whom we came, to whom we owe our lives, and to whom we go when we die.*

So, when we pray, "*Your Kingdom Come,*" we take upon ourselves something of the burdens of Amos, Micah, and Isaiah. We accept as our own God's intentions for the world. We pray for a more just economic order. We pray for an end to child abuse and rape—and for the cessation of rapacious wars. We concern ourselves with the dearth of justice and mercy and a right knowledge of God. We look *back* at the sorry record of human affairs. We look *forward* to a new and better state of affairs, one that moves beyond our imagination. We pray for the welfare of those who have been set to rule over us—and also that they will rule more wisely and more justly. We pray as those who trust that God rules history—and also as those who know they do not yet stand within God's realm.

In case you were wondering, this prayer is a cry for *revolution*. This prayer says that the powers that now rule our world ought to be overthrown and that a new government should be set up. After all, you can't call for a "*kingdom to come*" unless you intend for the present "*kingdom to go.*"

Has it occurred to you that the words we slip through so casually and so routinely each Sunday are in truth among the most revolutionary phrases the world has ever heard?

Is it possible, in fact, that we are praying for something that we don't really want?

You see, this kingdom has a kind of "spot" existence today. It exists *wherever* and *whenever* a single human being has given up fully to God and thus has entered into the kingdom—when a family, a church, an institution seeks fully to do God's will, the kingdom has come within that circle of life. The kingdom exists each time *love* conquers hate, *peace* triumphs over conflict, or *fear* and *selfishness* have been vanquished.

Friends, (remember!) the Lord's Prayer—and all prayer—begins with a *relationship*. And no matter how private our place of prayer, we can never speak this prayer in the *singular*; it is always "*Our Father*, because we speak it by the grace of the Savior who gave us the prayer and who empowers it, and because the God to whom we address this prayer has a heart for *all humankind*. This prayer touches the ultimate power of the universe—a power that can transform our daily lives and give new hope to our very universe.