

# The Prayer That Jesus Taught: Part 2 “Thy Will Be Done”- Do We Mean It?

**TEXT:**  
**Luke 11:1-4**  
**Matthew 6:7-13**

February 10, 2008

**D**uring this season of Lent we are exploring prayer both during the week with our Thursday night program on different ways to pray and in our Sunday morning worship as we explore the prayer that Jesus taught. So, I'd like to offer you two examples of prayer I find incredibly striking before we forge on from the “Our Father” of last week to the “kingdom come” of this week.

First is a prayer I remember vividly from childhood. It was offered from the pulpit one Sunday morning. I remember paying close attention, because the pastor said it was the best blessing he'd ever heard, and it was offered by a 7 year old one night over supper.

*“Dear God – Bless this food and the people who grew it and made it. But why did you have to create brussels sprouts? Amen.”*

I was enthralled! Could you really talk to God that way? Could I really be that honest in my prayers? Much to my parents' chagrin, I tried it myself at the supper table. And really, what defense did they have against the inappropriate nature of my honesty? After all, wasn't that the point of the sermon?

The second prayer I'd like to share is really a story. Like so many expressions of the divine mystery of God's relationship

with God's people, this one haunts me and moves me in inexplicable ways. It comes from the Hasidic Tradition of Judaism as relayed by Elie Wiesel.

*When the great Rabbi Israel Baal Shem-Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and misfortune averted.*

*Later, when his disciple, the celebrated Magid of Mezritch, had occasion, for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: “Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayers.” And again the miracle would be accomplished.*

*Still later, Rabbi Moshe-Leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say: “I do not know how to light the fire, I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient.” It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished.*

*Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: “I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer; I cannot even find the place in the forest.*

*All I can do is to tell the story, and that must be sufficient.” And it was sufficient. God made humankind because God loves stories.<sup>i</sup>*

It's a story of profound honesty in wanting to connect with the deity, wanting to commune and communicate with God, and slowly but surely over time losing the way, the proper words, the right position, the appropriate actions.

It's with great sincerity that the disciples ask of Jesus, according to the Luke's account, “Lord, teach us to pray.”<sup>ii</sup> We want to get it right. We want to have the right words and the right formula, so that maybe God will hear us, and we'll get an answer (or more accurately, sometimes, the answer we want). And so, Jesus gives the disciples this prayer, the only prayer Jesus taught.

But it's not the words alone, or the formula alone, but the honesty, the desire to connect, the intent behind the prayer that truly allows us to speak with God. Whether it's complaining about brussels sprouts (which I could never pray, because I like brussels sprouts) or whispering in the night that we've forgotten the words but are still willing to try – we have to mean it.

So we come to our part of the Lord's Prayer for this morning. Last week, Kent began us with “Our Father ...” and that's as far as we got. There's a lot to

unpack in those first few words. “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name.”

Now we look at the next petition. “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”<sup>iii</sup> We could, for simplicity sake, stop where Luke stops, merely praying, “Father ... thy kingdom come.”<sup>iv</sup> But Matthew’s version continues, “Thy kingdom come. **Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**”<sup>v</sup> There are some pretty significant implications in that second sentence. But, we have to stop and ask ourselves, wherever we begin and end, “Do we mean it?”

What do we mean by “Thy kingdom come”? And do we mean it?

What do we mean by, “Thy will be done,” and, “be done on earth as it is in heaven”? And do we mean that?

I remember sitting in chapel at Austin Seminary and hearing Rev. Cynthia Rigby preach. For those of you who don’t know Dr. Rigby, she is widely touted as one the most insightful theologians of our day. The most amazing thing about her is her humanity, her pure joy and excitement in exploring and talking about God. I’ve seen her fall off stages in lecture halls, because in her sheer enthusiasm for her subject she’s wandered too far from the podium and simply toppled off.

So, one day in chapel, she looked at us all from the great heights of that gothic pulpit and said, “Thy kingdom come, huh? Really. Do you want that today? Or do you want one more day to finish that paper you owe me? Do you want one more day to

raid the fridge and watch reruns on the couch? Can you image what a difference there would be around here is God’s kingdom really came, **today**? Do you mean it? If you don’t, don’t pray it. God just might be listening.”

Do we mean it? What would it look like if God’s kingdom came today, and God’s will was done right here in Lawrence as well as in the heavens above? And what do our two different gospel readings, our two different versions of the prayer Jesus taught, say about our desire and our intent on behalf of God?

From Luke, we hear simply, “Thy kingdom come.”<sup>vi</sup> With such a simple statement, I’m compelled to think of God’s direct intervention, the massive reordering of the world that leaves everything we’ve to come recognize and expect around us gone – replaced by the good creation from the beginning, before the Fall, before the gate to the Garden was locked.

In such a simple statement, firm and direct, I hear an honest cry for the reality of John’s Revelation, that we might see, right here, right now, the new heaven and the new earth where the home of God is among mortals ... they will be his people and God himself will be with them; [God] will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more ... the first things [having] passed away.”<sup>vii</sup>

The apocalyptic “kingdom come”. The rending of the curtain that separates heaven from earth. The descending of the heavenly kingdom to earth, replacing what is here, and

setting up an entirely new, good, recreated order. “Thy kingdom come,” goes the prayer in Luke.<sup>viii</sup>

That’s one option. That’s one way you or I might pray this prayer, and I’m sure there are days we mean it. There are days when we look around at the suffering and despair and hardships of the world and cry to the heavens, “God, get down here and fix this! Now! Thy kingdom come!”

But there’s another option, another version. Matthew takes the petition a bit further. “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”<sup>ix</sup> Now wait a minute, that seems to keep the two apart, heaven and earth. That seems to imply two different realms, two different realities, operating under the same system of governance – God in charge; God making the rules. The Lord of heaven **and** earth, involved in both, managing both, but relying on those who dwell within to follow the rules and make things happen. “Thy will be done. Let us do as you wish, here on earth, just like the saints and angels do in heaven.”

Oops. This requires effort. This is no “God-to-rescue-falling-from-the-sky” scenario. This requires work on the part of the ones praying even as they implore God to take action and enable change. Do we mean it?

I think we do. In all honesty, since we are talking about the honesty of our petitions to God today, I think we mean it and try very hard to live out the will of God in our daily life together. Think about it. What would God’s kingdom look like? What would God want to see done on

earth to get us more in line with heaven?

If heaven is a dwelling place for all who trust in Christ, then earth must need homes for those without them. As a congregation, we are a covenant partner with Habitat for Humanity, have members who take in exchange students studying far from home, and are ramping up our efforts to help the homeless within our community through adult education and outreach. “Thy will be done.”

If heaven is a place where pain and suffering are no more, then earth must need healing arts, food for the hungry, and aid for the despairing. As a congregation, we have doctors and nurses working in our congregation and in our community to increase awareness of healthy living and heal the sick, just collected a table overflowing with soup, fill the shopping carts with our first fruits each month, and give monetary assistance through Ballard and ECKAN. “Thy will be done.”

If heaven is a place where every tear is wiped from the eye and mourning is no more, then earth must be a place in need of comfort, compassion, mercy, kindness, and love. As a congregation, we are served by deacons who minister to our members, hold each other in handshakes and hugs as we meet on Sundays and throughout the week, offer blue cards of encouragement to those we know and those we’ve never met, and provide this place, this community, this church family that greets with open arms and open hearts any and all who come through these doors with

warmth and smiles and directions to the bathroom or Sunday school. “Thy will be done.”

I look at the faces and the graces that shine within these walls and then go out into the world each week, and I truly believe that when we come to this portion of the prayer that Jesus taught, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,”<sup>x</sup> we mean it. Or at least, we usually do, most days.

But it is Lent. It is the season of introspection, reflection, and repentance. It’s that forty day period of the year when we look back on all the good we’ve done and weigh it against the bad. It’s that forty day period when we look at all the positive steps we’ve taken and then see all the others we missed – jumping over them, tripping over them, or tumbling back down to the bottom to begin the climb again. Lent is that forty day period of the year when we think, very carefully, about our honesty in our prayers and whether or not we truly mean it every time we pray.

To be Presbyterian, to be Christian, is to be a follower of Christ who prays without ceasing. So my challenge to you, this Lent, whether you’ve given up something (fasting from indulgence) or taken on a practice (adding to your yoke), is to think about your life – every facet of it – as a single prayer to God offered from the moment you were born ‘til the day you die. Do you mean it?

Over the remaining 36 or so days of Lent as we study prayer, think about how each action, each thought, each gesture, each word fits into this prayer that

Jesus taught.

“Lord teach us to pray,” they asked of Him.<sup>xi</sup>

With honesty & without ceasing, let us say it and mean it:  
“Thy kingdom come.  
Thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

**This sermon delivered by  
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i. An Advent Sourcebook. Thomas J. O’Gorman, ed. (Chicago, IL: Archdiocese of Chicago Liturgy Training Publications) 1988, pp. 82-83.

ii. The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version (New York: HarperCollins Publishers) 1993, Luke 11:1.

iii. Ibid., Matthew 6:10.

iv. Ibid., Luke 11:2.

v. Ibid., Matthew 6:10.

vi. Ibid., Luke 11:2.

vii. Ibid., Revelation 21:3-4.

viii. Ibid., Luke 11:2.

ix. Ibid., Matthew 6:11.

x. Ibid.

xi. Ibid., Luke 11:2.