

Your Kingdom Come

Luke 11: 1- 4

First United Church of Christ, Northfield, MN

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I wonder if you, like me, grew up with a family practice of prayer. I wonder if you had a ritual of praying over every meal. Hands clasped together, heads bowed, eyes closed, waiting for a word to arise, and spoken out loud, addressed to a heavenly Father. I wonder who lead the prayer in your family if there was such a practice. I wonder what you learned about prayer either in the absence of it or in the practice therein.

I learned about prayer sitting around meal tables with words conjured by my father sitting with my three siblings and mother in much the manner I just described. I learned in those moments that prayer was connected to relationship and gratitude and creating a vision for our daily lives. And because there was one voice that usually spoke and it was formal and regimented in time, there was room for me to grow in what prayer meant for me as an individual.

That seemed to be the case for the disciples as well who raised a question to Jesus asking him to teach them to pray. You would think traveling around the countryside and watching and listening and participating all along, that the disciples would have some idea about what it is to practice prayer. The Jesus we find in the Gospel of Luke is always praying. In this chapter we find that to be true again. This story and teaching follow on the heels of Jesus' encounter with Mary and Martha where Jesus seems to choose Mary's devotion to prayer over Martha's worry about hospitality. As David Lose, former president of Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia comments, "Given the disciples exposure to Jesus' practice, and their awareness that John (the Baptist) had taught his disciples to pray, it's only natural that they would ask him for instruction. Luke's version of Jesus' response – is what we call the Lord's Prayer but, given the intended audience and use, it might be better named the Disciples' Prayer"¹

So as disciples ourselves, which literally means "learners," what do we learn about prayer from Jesus and the petitions he suggests we pray to God? To continue a thread that David Lose shared in his commentary, Jesus teaches the disciples less about the how, what and why of prayer and more about the who we are praying to.

It is natural to want to know more about the mechanics of prayer, but Jesus teaches us that prayer is most importantly about coming closer to the who. "Jesus invites us into relationship with God through prayer, offering us the opportunity to approach the God whose name is too holy to speak and whose countenance too terrible to behold with the familiarity, boldness, and trust of a young child running to her parent for both provision and protection."²

Fostering a relationship with the "who," with God in prayer opens the opportunity to more closely align with God's vision, God's hopes, God's dreams, God's judgment and God's grace in the world. And this deepening of relationship is needed to understand what it means to pray each of the petitions in the prayer Jesus suggests we pray. To pray the words "your Kingdom come" must be born of an intimacy and awareness of whose kingdom, whose realm we seek to be close to.

To pray "your Kingdom come" means we need to be familiar with what the reign of God looks like, sounds like, feels like in its fullness. Jesus certainly preached the Kingdom of God – it is the thing

¹ David Lose, [Working Preacher Commentary](#), July 25, 2010

² Ibid.

he talked about the most. The picture Jesus painted of the Kingdom of God of course turned our usual notions of the way things should be upside down.

Diana Butler Bass wrote about this recently in an essay on the power of the word “and.” In the essay she writes that early Christians would not recognize what “Christian America” has become. Where too often we see a brand of Christianity that is wall-building, exclusivity preaching and superiority over other religions promoting, Butler Bass reminds us of our roots and the God behind them. She writes, “This [kind of Christianity] would have been a big surprise to the early Christians, those who took up the new faith in the years following Jesus’ death. They proclaimed a creed. But it wasn’t the familiar creed that most Christians know from church. The first creed was this:

For you are all children of God in the Spirit.

There is no Jew or Greek;

There is no slave or free;

There is no male and female.

For you are all one in the Spirit.

... When new followers joined the Jesus movement, the words were repeated to those about to be baptized: *You are all children of God. There is no Jew or Greek; There is no slave or free. There is no male and female. For you all one in the spirit.*

Butler Bass continues, “This was powerful. The ancient Roman world was even more divided than ours. It was a society of hierarchies where certain ethnicities were privileged, people who were free were deemed fully human and slaves considered as beasts, and men were always superior to women. Bigotry, slavery, and sexism were the coinage of the Roman Empire. Jesus challenged all this by welcoming sinners and outcasts, by eating with people deemed unclean, and insisting that those who were last would be first.”³

To pray, “your Kingdom come,” is to affirm this ancient creed, to deride division, to build bridges not walls, to proclaim a both/and world and balance the books on race, class, sexual orientation and gender.

To pray “your Kingdom come” arises from a deep understanding of God’s realm- its characteristics, its qualities, the things we are called to co-create with God in the here and now.

To pray “your Kingdom come” solicits daily revelation and renewed identification with the way God sees the world. I imagine this prayer like an exhibit at the DeCordova Museum in the Boston area.⁴ (Show picture) Sonya Clark is a professor of art at Amherst College in Massachusetts. Her work “Unraveling,” begun in 2015, is a public unwinding of the Confederate battle flag, thread by thread, as a response to the police killings of Black people. The piece is part of her deep commitment to picking apart America’s whitewashed history of racial brutality in slow, deliberate ways.

This unraveling of racial injustice is an expression of praying “your Kingdom come.” The thread by thread work of daily deepening relationship with God’s purposes drives us closer to its realization.

To pray “your Kingdom come” is to ask God – how can I be part of what you are doing in the world? Come November 3rd, I imagine each one of us taking this prayer in tow to the ballot box. For to pray “your Kingdom come” is to align our lives, our decisions, our actions with God’s ordering of the world. We are not voting a Republican vision or a Democratic vision. We are tasked with asking, how does this candidate’s plans and values align with a prayerful, relational understanding of God’s vision. Praying “your Kingdom come” is not a powerless prayer. It does not leave decisions in the hands of

³ Diana Butler Bass, [The Importance of “And,”](#) August 13, 2020

⁴ Sonya Clark, [Unraveling](#), August 15, 2020

others but invites us to be clear about the values of community God wishes us to create. It also encourages us to ask how we can partner with God in co-creating this community.

This sermon will end with an explicit invitation to practice this prayer in a particular way. As you prepare to vote this season – whether that is ordering a ballot to vote by mail, studying the issues at hand, listening to the debates, reading voter guides, casting your eyes over newspaper summaries, Reddit synopses or conversing with friends, family or colleagues – approach all of it with this prayer on your lips and in your hearts – “your Kingdom come.” When you drop off, mail or cast your ballot pray “your Kingdom come.” And then pay attention. See what rises up. Notice if it feels different. Talk with someone about it and keep praying it. I look forward to your stories. I suspect God does too. Amen.