**“Whose Will Be Done?”**

**Rev. Clinton G. Roberts First Presbyterian Church of Lake Forest March 13, 2022**

During this season of Lent, First Presbyterian is focusing on the words of the Lord’s Prayer using Adam Hamilton’s book by the same title as a way of deepening our discipleship and informing our faith. The prayer itself has been familiar to many of us since childhood, and is considered by Hamilton to be the single most important prayer we can pray: he says it has substance and purpose and power to change the world. The Lord’s Prayer is prayed aloud in unison most every Sunday in this and most other churches. Yet its intimate, familial address of God, and its inclusion of all people, blesses us with ties that can bind even strangers in the work of the kingdom and the doing of God’s will.

The Prayer begins with *“Our Father:”* in itself a radical statement of belonging with implications powerful enough to change the world—if only the world had faith. For those who do believe, who strive to walk by faith and not by sight, these lines from John Fawcett’s cherished hymn ring true:

*Before our Father’s throne we pour our ardent prayers.*

*Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one, our comforts and our cares.*

I suspect many of us are praying in that same vein as we watch with deep anguish this entirely unnecessary war of aggression unfolding its dark and hideous wings over Ukraine.

“*Our Father,”* we plead, on behalf of ourselves, the Ukrainians, and all God’s people, *“Sanctify your name.” “Your kingdom come,”* we petition, as we watch the devastating advance of the Russian military. *“Your will be done,”*  we pray, even as millions of exhausted women, children, and aged refugees flood the neighboring countries desperately seeking shelter from the cruise missiles, the artillery shells, and now the cluster bombs being rained down upon them. In the face of these atrocities, praying itself would seem to be futile. Some would even argue that the time for prayer has passed. Yet prayer still provides the single, most consistent human corridor connecting us to the Maker of heaven and earth, through the Son who laid down his life for us. The One we call the Prince of Peace.

I

Last week, we examined the First Petition: *“Hallowed be thy name.”* Today we will look at the central petition of the whole prayer itself: *“Thy kingdom come;”* along with its couplet, *“Thy will be done—on earth as it is in heaven.”* How encouraging it is, that Jesus intended for us to remember that beyond this present darkness there is a place of *“full release,”* of *“comfort sweet,”* of *“joy and peace”*—near to the heart of God. Which just might suggest, despite all evidence to the contrary, that heaven is nearer than we think.

Both the Old and New Testaments provide us with imagery concerning God’s kingdom, which can also be anticipated as the Omega-point of human history. In the second Chapter of Isaiah, the prophet offers a vision of a high mountain—Zion itself, where the Lord’s house (perhaps like the Biltmore House only much, much bigger!) will welcome and receive people from all nations. In the twenty-fifth Chapter of the same book, we are told that upon this mountain God will throw a great party: a feast of good things, where Death itself will be swallowed away, and every tear upon every cheek wiped dry. As Adam Hamilton suggests, when we pray *“Thy kingdom come,”* we are meant to envision that.

In the New Testament, the Grand Finale in the Book of Revelation offers us a vision of the City of God: the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven as beautiful as a bride on her wedding day, adorned with love, joy and peace. The City will have streets of gold and towers bejeweled with precious stones; within its walls all nations shall come; for God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb; its gates stand wide open; and mourning, and crying, and pain will be no more. Here on earth, whenever we pray the Second Petition, we should be looking up, and imagining that.

II

But here on earth, as we look instead at our 24-hour news cycles, this strife-torn world looks anything but. There is mourning and crying and pain most everywhere. Our tears have not ceased rolling down our cheeks ever since Adam and Eve were first expelled from Eden and watched unconsoled as their first home faded “into the light of common day.” Nowadays, this means watching disconsolately as millions of tearful refugees flee from their own homes which have now been turned into killing grounds, heroically defended by Ukraine’s native sons who refuse to submit to the tyrannical ambitions of a merciless, wanna-be Czar.

So how, then, will the promise of this prayer be embraced *“on earth as it is in heaven?”* “Whose will-will be done? How can we trust that what we’re praying for will someday come to pass? Jesus himself provided four answers, all of which are recorded in the Gospels.

1. First, in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus begins his ministry by going to where the people lived, saying, *“The kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe the good news”* (Mk. 1:15). A kingdom can mean, *“a country or nation ruled by a king or queen,”*  such as Saudi Arabia or more democratically, the United Kingdom. In the Bible, a kingdom is often associated with *“a realm under the control of a particular person;”* and in the Gospels, with *“the spiritual authority and rule of God.”* So we learn that the kingdom of God is not an earthly place or destination. When asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, Jesus answered, *“The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you”* (Lk. 17:20-21). We now understand it was Jesus himself who was bringing God’s kingdom among them. And he still is doing that today. Christ will come to us when we call on the name of the Lord.
2. Second, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus ends his earthly ministry by teaching three so-called “Kingdom Parables,” all of which are found in Chapter 25. The last, which is not a parable but a prophecy, envisions the Son of Man enthroned in glory with all the nations assembled before him. This King will then pass judgment, saying, *“For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me; I was naked and you gave me clothing; I was sick and you took care of me; I was in prison and you visited me”* (Mt. 25:35-36). These six acts of mercy correspond to the six petitions found in the Lord’s Prayer. They clearly and unambiguously set forth the substance and outcome of what is meant when we pray, *“Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done.”* If we are to petition God for these things, we must be prepared to do them to *“the least of these,”* the members of Christ’s family. Because this is exactly what this kingdom looks like on earth:

* People have nutritious food to eat
* And clean water to drink;
* They have warm clothes and safe lodgings;
* They are welcomed in from the cold.
* When sick, they are cared for;
* And if imprisoned--not forgotten!

So now when we think about it, this coming kingdom can be seen and experienced in many places—even the worst of places. Perhaps especially there, when people are actively seeking to love and serve others as Christ has loved and served us.

1. Third, in the Gospel of John, when Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate, Pilate asked him, *“Are you the King of the Jews?”* (Jn. 18:33). Jesus answered, *“My kingdom is not from this world. If it were, my followers would be fighting…”* This must mean that if, in Christ, we too have become children of God, then we too must be *“in”* the world but not “of” it. We are citizens of heaven. We are subjects of the King. And we are *“heirs of the grace of life.”*
2. Finally, when Jesus himself was in the Garden of Gethsemane, according to Luke he told his disciples, *“Pray that you may not come into the time of trial”* (Lk. 22:40). But his time of trial was clearly at hand. He knelt down and prayed, *“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done.”* At this critical moment, as he faced in all his human weakness the horror of the cross, the strength of his obedience enabled him to say, *“Thy will be done.”* Thy will be done. And in everything that followed, we find Jesus to be calm, unbreakable, and unafraid, even when the nails were breaking apart his body.

**Conclusion**

\*A friend of mine who served as a pilot on board the USS Kitty Hawk during the War in Vietnam had the former lead pilot for the Blue Angels as his commanding officer. On one occasion, while flying F4 Phantoms, they both fell under attack by five Vietnamese MiG 22’s. After the violent dogfight subsided (which they both fortunately survived), my friend asked his commander, who had displayed tremendous calm throughout the engagement, *“What guides you?”* He responded, *“I don’t let my mind guide me. The Lord’s Kingdom is in my heart.”*

Friends, when we undertake to pray to God saying, *“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done;”* we are praying for that Kingdom to be established first in us. Like the prophet Jeremiah promised, we are asking for God’s law to be written not on stone tablets but upon our hearts. *“Thy will be done”* must begin with us—and in us--when we undertake with humility to fight the good fight of justice and mercy: with courage, compassion, perseverance and grace. No amount of war or weaponry; no amount of suffering, violence or death can ever undo the work of the Kingdom. Because the heart of that Kingdom is Love itself. His name is Jesus, whom we crucified between two thieves. But love cannot die; and after three days, he rose again, assuring those who believe that this Kingdom, made up of faith, hope and love, will endure and remain with us always.

*Let us pray:*

*Lord Jesus Christ, King of Love, as this darkened world witnesses the great suffering of the Ukrainian People and the possibility that this foolish conflict might spread, be near to them and stay near to us. Restrain and overcome this fraudulent power of evil, for the true Kingdom, and the genuine power, and the consummate glory belong to our God, now and forever.*

*Amen.*