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Lord, Teach Us to Pray – Kingdom Praying

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TEXT: Luke 11:1-4 (NRSV)

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

Many years ago, the congregation I was serving went through a lengthy period of rapid growth. We rejoiced in that growth, but we also knew we had to manage it, deal with it. So we put big additions onto our building and then we expanded our staff and then we expanded our parking lot and remodeled the sanctuary to put more chairs in. And still, the growth in the crowdedness continued to challenge us. Then we added more service times, of course, and while this was exciting, it was getting to be problematic. There was no more space now to grow. We had maxed out our property. I began to have conversations with our leadership about the need to relocate the church in order to handle present and future growth. And this conversation is, you can imagine, created some tension in our congregation. There were a few people who really wanted to just stay put. And in their anxiety and fear over the thought of relocating, they lashed out a bit at the leadership through the grapevine. I caught wind of an accusation that “Kramer was just wanting to build his personal kingdom to feed his ego.” It hurt my feelings at the time. I was upset, but I'd heard from people wiser than me earlier on in ministry that it's important to listen carefully to your critics and ask yourself that gut wrenching question: “Is it true?” And ask those around you who know you if there's

any truth to it. And if there's not truth, then to use those comments to serve as a caution for you as you carry on. Well, it turns out in discussion and praying about this, it wasn't true, but this experience made me all the more resolved to not let ministry be about me and my ego needs, but about God's kingdom expansion in the lives of people who need Jesus.

As God's children in Christ, you see, it's vital that we keep our priorities straight and that they be aligned with God's. Today's petition from the Lord's Prayer helps us to do just that. In the third session of the Lord's Prayer that Jesus is teaching us now, he says "When you pray, say, 'Father, your kingdom come.'" After we talk to the father, about the father and about his person being honored and revered, then we talk to the father about his program, the Kingdom of God. When Jesus talked about God's kingdom, he was not referring to a geographical place or a political kingdom. He was talking about God's rule, God's reign over people's lives were his will would be done. God's Kingdom was a major theme in the messages of Jesus. Jesus came proclaiming that the good news of the Kingdom of God had arrived through him when he came on the scene. Therefore, in response to this good news, he preached the people were to repent and believe in him and enter in and live under God's kingly rule. Now, as people of that kingdom who believe in Jesus Christ, Jesus teaches us to pray for that kingdom to come and impact the world. When we pray for God's kingdom to come, we're praying for God's rule to happen in the future, in the present, and also in our personal lives.

First, we look at the future. We're living in the "already and not yet time." Christ has come, Christ has risen, Christ has ascended, and he's coming again. The kingdom is broken in through Jesus, but there will be a final consummation when he comes again. We're headed to an end of history as we know it, and God will have the final word over this world when Jesus reappears in power and majesty to judge the living and the dead and establish the new Heaven and Earth for eternity. And God's will will be done on Earth as it is in heaven by his angels now – perfectly. All will be well, it will be glorious, wonderful beyond our wildest imaginations and dreams because we'll be with him and there'll be no more suffering or death or sorrow or evil. As followers of Jesus, we await and longingly pray then for that kingly rule to come – the new world. In the hymn *It Is Well*, the last verse reflects that:

And Lord haste the day when faith shall be sight, the clouds be rolled back like a scroll.
The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend. Praise the Lord,
Praise the Lord, oh my soul.

What a glorious day. So, when we pray “thy kingdom come” as God’s children through Christ, we’re asking, “Lord, won’t you come? Come soon! Bring your plan to completion. We long to see you face to face and live with you and eternity and serve you in your perfect eternal kingdom.” That’s our hope. What a glorious day that is going to be.

But while we’re waiting for that great and glorious day to arrive, we’re also asking when we say, ask “father, your kingdom come,” to continue to come even now in this world, in the present time. It’s presently here, Jesus brought it, but still it’s in process as God’s rule comes into the lives of people when they receive Jesus into their lives and repent and are born again. It shows up then in the various little kingdoms that people live in, like their families and companies and businesses and institutions and governments where God’s word is being obeyed and his will than is being done by his people. And there’s loving and serving and justice and kindness. When we pray “your kingdom come,” we’re asking “Lord by the power of your spirit, won’t you continue to infiltrate this world with your gospel and change people’s lives? May your rule begin now in our world, we need you to come and heal, hurts to come and overcome evil and transform lives by your spirit’s power.” For we know there’s another kingdom in this world, Satan’s kingdom, which seeks to thwart your plans and create confusion in people’s lives and keep them away from your salvation in Christ. So, may that kingdom come into everyone’s life now, father, as the gospel goes forth.

Finally, we’re asking, “father, may your kingdom come in me in my life.” This petition is welcoming God to take over our personal lives as his people to rule over every department of those lives so that we may do his will in loving response to what he’s done for us through Jesus Christ. This petition expresses our personal commitment and desire to obey his holy word and live a godly life for him – a life of love and service and righteousness and integrity. I found Martin Luther’s small catechism really helpful in understanding this petition. He answers the question “What does your kingdom come mean?” with this explanation:

God’s kingdom comes indeed without our praying for it, but we pray that it may also come to us. That happens when our Heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit so that by his grace, we believe his holy word and live a godly life on Earth now and in Heaven forever. This petition is asking God to not only come in and rule over me, then, it’s also asking God to come in and use me as he fills me with this Holy Spirit so that I might be empowered to bear fruit to his glory, to bring

others into his kingdom, to live under his glorious, loving rulership because everybody needs Jesus as a subject of his kingdom.

His desire is my desire. My desire is that his kingly rule would also come into the lives of those around me because I know that God wants all people to be saved and to live under his rule and serve him in righteousness and innocence in blessedness. And so this petition, I am praying, "Father, I'm with you, may your kingdom come into the lives of others through me and through your church so that your kingdom will grow and grow and grow. I'm yours. Use me. May I be an effective instrument for you in this world." And Jesus is showing us how we can be effective instruments. That happens when we, as Christ followers, do God's will by living out the great commandment of loving God with all your heart and soul, strength and mind and loving your neighbor as yourself.

Loving others in word and deed can make a big impact on others for the Kingdom of God. As you read through the Gospels, you can't help but notice the love and compassion of Jesus for every kind of person he encountered. He listened, he helped, he served and people were attracted to him. Christian servanthood fueled by God's spirit, love and compassion, can be so powerful that just witnessing it can help open an unbelievable heart to the gospel and move them to ask the question, "Why are you doing this?" So, as we pray thy kingdom come, let us be asking God for eyes to see and ears to hear people's needs around us, and then for opportunities to actively love them as Jesus, would.

These opportunities sometimes are unexpected for us and inconvenient. Listen to Jeff's story. He's a Christian caregiver to AIDS patients. He writes

It had been a trying week at our Love In Action office. At five o'clock on a Friday, I was looking forward to having a quiet dinner with friends. Then the phone rang. "Jeff, it's Jimmy." I heard a quivering voice say. Jimmy, who suffered for several AIDS related illnesses, was one of our regulars. "I'm really sick, Jeff. I've got a fever. Please come help me." I was angry after a 60-hour work week. I didn't want to hear from Jimmy, but I promised him I'd come over. Still, during the drive, I complained to God about the inconvenience of it all. The moment I walked in the door, I could smell his vomit. Jimmy was on the sofa, shivering. I wiped his forehead, got a bucket of soapy water to clean up the mess. I managed to maintain a show of concern, though I was upset inside. Jimmy's friend Russ, who also had AIDS, came down the stairs and the odor made Russ sick too, and he vomited. As I cleaned the carpet around Rusty's chair, I was about ready to

explode inside. I was fed up. Then Russ startled me. He said, "I understand. I understand!" "What Russ?" Jimmy asked weakly. "I understand who Jesus is," Russ said through his tears. "He's like Jeff." And then I began to cry, and I hugged Russ and prayed with him. That night Russ trusted Jesus as his savior. Now, you and I are well aware it doesn't always end like that, but it's good to hear that sometimes it does. Sometimes, though, our efforts at loving and serving can be thankless and feel fruitless. But we do it anyway out of obedience to our loving father. We also are useful instruments when we strive to carry out the great commission of making disciples of all nations by telling people around us of what God has done for them through the work of his son, Jesus Christ. And then we disciple them in the promises and the ways of God's kingdom. That is God's number one thing on his list for us is for our lives, as his subjects, that we would tell our story about him because God loves people and wants all of them to turn from their worship of their temporal kingdoms that rule over them and step into the eternal kingdom. To trust in Jesus Christ. As God's sons and daughters, his mission team, we are to love them as God loves them. We tell them the good news, we don't keep them guessing. We tell them about what God's done for all of us through the death and resurrection of Jesus. So therefore, when we pray "your kingdom come in my life," we're asking for witnesses and opportunities to tell God's story to those in our personal network so that they might repent and become children of God and live under his rule.

That "Kingdom of God" petition is loaded, isn't it? That God's rule would continue to come among us in the present and be consummated in the future when Jesus reappears; that he would take over our individual lives and rule over us in daily matters and use us to bring others in through the working of his Holy Spirit. It's a great petition for us to pray. I hope you'll make a mental note of this to include this petition and praying about God's Kingdom in your daily praying this week. May his kingdom come and may he use you and your life to his glory and honor. Let's pray this petition together now before we go our separate ways. Father, your kingdom come. Oh, how our world needs your kingdom rule. How they need you, all of us. Help us, o lord, to seek your kingdom first in our homes, our work, our play, our planning, our stewardship and in all our relationships. May we be spirit-filled, obedient sons and daughters of your kingdom who do your will and bring other lost people into your kingdom. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our lord. Amen.