A Dream of the Kin-dom

The Lord’s Prayer Sermon Series, Part 2

Rev. Cathy C. Hoop Grace Presbyterian Church July 17, 2021

How many of you spent a summer at camp when you were young? Scout camp, church camp, the camp your siblings or even your parents attended? My sister grew up going to Camp DeSoto in Mentone, Alabama. I never attended as a camper, but I ended up working there one summer as a counselor. I was placed with the youngest campers – the first graders who were away from home for a month! A month…some stayed two. Our cabins were in the section of camp known as the “enchanted forest.” The traditions hadn’t changed through the years – you still wore white shorts and shirts on Sundays for worship, and the Sunday dessert was a slab of vanilla ice cream, which you ate with peanut butter and honey.

One of my sons did space camp in Huntsville and robotics camp in Chicago. Another came down from Nashville to go to football camp right here in T-town! The thing that every camp has in common is that campers go home with mildewing clothes and great stories. Parents just hope that their kids wear all the underwear they sent with them.

Every camp also has games. Silly games, messy games, competitive games. Games to fill the time while waiting for the next activity. And there are always get to know you games, some of which are fun and others of which are stressful. I remember one we played at the church camp in Tennessee. It was called “Punchenella.” Everyone would get in a big circle and one person would be picked to go to the middle. Everyone would sing, “O, what can you do, Punchanella, Punchanella, O what can you do Punchanella funny you?” And the person standing in the middle was expected to do something “cool:” it might be a fabulous dance move or it might be making a funny sound with your hand in your arm pit. Then everyone sang, “o, we can do it, too, Punchanella, Punchanella…”Of course, everyone was planning to make the armpit noise, so you just wanted to be called on early in the game…so stressful…worrying that you won’t be funny, and that everyone will be stuck having to do whatever embarrassing thing you can come up with…such as standing there looking embarrassed.

So when I was at Living River camp, and the counselors called the kids to circle up before leaving the swimming hole, I got nervous. All those old memories. They put someone in the center of the circle. “Here we go…” I thought. “This won’t be pretty,” I thought. “Someone will feel embarrassed and awkward,” I thought. But here’s what happened. The counselor called out to the kid in the center of the circle, “What your name?”

“Gina”
“Hi, Gina!” shouts everyone in the circle.

“What’s your favorite color?” the counselor calls out to Gina.

“Red!” shouts Gina.

“Red?” shouts the counselor. And the whole circle responds, “That’s awesome!”

No awkward dance moves. No trying to come up with a joke on the spot. Just an answer to a simple question, and then being told, “that’s awesome!”

Next camper goes in the circle, and the process is repeated.

New question: “What’s your favorite pizza topping?”

Camper stands there…silence…finally, camper says, “I don’t know!”

Counselor says, “I don’t know!”

And the whole circle says, “That’s awesome!”

That’s how I imagine the kin-dom of God.

God’s children, in a circle, celebrating one another. Not for what you have achieved, or how much money you have earned, or how many titles you have in front of your name. God’s flawed people, standing in a circle, affirming one another, affirming that having been created in God’s image, we are awesome in God’s sight. Affirming rather than tearing down. Establishing a base line understanding of how God sees each of us.

The value of each person recognized, whether they have the answers or not.

*Bring in your kingdom so that your will is done on earth as it’s done in heaven.*

I may be totally off base here, but I don’t think Jesus was referring to streets of gold when he spoke of the kingdom. So what did Jesus mean? How does this happen, God’s realm on earth? When does it happen? What does it mean for us?

In praying these words – bring in your kingdom – it feels a bit like trying to turn back time. Could we undo what happened at the beginning of time? Could we have a “do-over” and restore the harmony of Eden: all creation dwelling with God, in a place of peace? God tried that with the great flood, but we landed right back where we started. So, I’m guessing it is neither streets of gold nor a complete do-over of creation.

Before we go any further, we probably need to talk about why you hear us dropping the “g” from the middle of the word when we use it in worship, and use instead the word, “kin-dom.” Jesus’ community longed for a kingdom, God’s kingdom to be restored. Kings and kingdoms were the way their world worked, but a kingdom, with its inherent hierarchies, inherited power and autocratic practices, isn’t an image that conveys the justice and mercy of God’s realm. Kingdom perpetuates the very things Jesus was undoing, and frankly, only if you are viewing the world from a place of privilege can the concept of a “kingdom” be a comforting one today. Though **we** may not dwell in a “kingdom” we cannot deny the hierarchies we have erected within our own nation. So you will often hear us use “kin-dom” here in hopes of empowering us to imagine a world so different from the one we have come to accept. The best we can do is look to Jesus’ stories and see how he deconstructs our earthly ideas of kingdom – even benevolent ones, our ideas of life in community.

Last week we explored the word “Father” and the connection that one word carries with it, the connection to Moses calling upon Pharaoh to set free God’s child, Israel. God the parent of Israel, who claims their child from slavery, also calls upon them to remember their past, remember their story. And so, Jesus, calls upon the Father to set God’s people free once again, free from all forms of enslavement, to bring in a kin-dom like none that has existed on this earth.

In God’s realm there is no slavery, no hierarchy, no powerless and powerful. A place in which God’s people live in freedom. But why would Jesus teach his disciples to pray for this? Isn’t this simply part of God’s design from the very beginning? To ultimately restore the earth, to restore creation? Why do we continue to pray for this?

The synoptic gospel writings would lead us to believe that Jesus spoke about God’s realm continually, referring to it some 149 times. Why wouldn’t he? He must have been a little homesick as he walked this sometimes unrecognizable earth. And what do you do when you are missing a place? You talk about it. He described it in parable after parable. He described it, but he never defined it.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Jesus, the master storyteller, knew his audience, “lulling listeners into familiarity” [with stories of farming, herding, fishing, building, family life] before plunging them into a quirky reality that upsets their expectations in a manner either refreshing or disturbing” writes theologian C. Clifton Black.[[2]](#endnote-2) Parables are our best option for understanding the nature of God’s kin-dom, but they confuse as often as they clarify.

Remember the two disciples, James and John, who asked Jesus if he would save them the seats on his right and left in God’s kingdom? And who among us wouldn’t want Jesus to save us a seat at the best lunch table ever?? But what they don’t get is that when God’s realm is realized, Jesus won’t be sitting down with his feet propped up on pillows. He will be kneeling to wash bleeding feet that had been in need of shoes. He will be standing to wipe away tears from a lifetime of grief. He will be playing tag with children, allowing himself to be caught every time. And most of all he will be standing to watch the doorway, waiting to welcome the one who is so surprised to be there. And when all of that is done, he will be moving amongst us all, serving the cup of life and the bread of heaven to all of us who have been hungering and thirsting. He won’t be sitting down. So at best there could only have ever been an empty seat between the brothers.

Had James and John been paying attention? They were walking with a laborer who owned no land, who had no assurance of when he would find his next meal. One who was dependent upon the compassion of others. Subject to on-going ridicule. God could have chosen anything, but God chose this way of being in the world. This is the one who invites us to participate in God’s realm. Are we brave enough to do this work? This is a “risky, crazy prayer,” writes N.T. Wright. The “prayer of submission and commission, or, if you like, the prayer of subversion and conversion.”[[3]](#endnote-3)

A radical prayer, a revolutionary prayer. It’s not how we usually think of the Lord’s Prayer, but that’s exactly what it is, and it calls us to live God’s dream with both boldness and gentleness…as demonstrated by a young person of our community this past week.

I received this message from a parent, and share this with the youth’s permission.

This summer “Jay” was on the wibit (inflatable pool trampoline) with some kids who had been to a vacation Bible school earlier that day. These kids were having a great time going through all the people who were going to hell for all sorts of infractions (being Muslim or gay were on their lists.) “Jay” said to them “I think you’ve misunderstood God’s Grace.” Like that was it, just this even keeled observation. Later “Jay” said to them “Heaven is a more inclusive place than you are describing.”

And as the parent added, there was no reverse bullying, simply the invitation to another way of understanding God’s home. “Bring in your kingdom, so your will is done on earth as in heaven.” Let us walk in this way, scattering the seeds of subversion. Scattering them within the earth of our own bodies, in the earth around us that God’s kin-dom may be known within us and among us. May it be so, servant God. May it be so. Amen.

1. Black, C. Clifton, Interpretation: The Lord’s Prayer. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Ky, 2018, p. 108. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid, p. 127 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Wright, N. T. The Lord and His Prayer (p. 20). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)