

## **Thy Kingdom Come**

Matthew 6:9-10a

Sunday, January 31, 2021, Aledo UMC

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### **Sermon Text, Matthew 6:9-10a**

<sup>9</sup> (Jesus said unto them,) “After this manner therefore pray ye: ‘Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come...’”

### **Sermon, “Thy Kingdom Come”**

*This is the third of ten sermons I will be preaching on the Lord’s Prayer*

I’m currently reading Ken Foskett’s excellent biography of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. The book traces the various factors which shaped his life, and in the process, goes all the way back to the early 1800s when Justice Thomas’ forebears were slaves in Georgia. Unfortunately, Justice Thomas’ genealogy can only go back so far because when it came to slaves, who cares who your parents were, let alone your grandparents. After all, slaves didn’t belong to parents or grandparents; they belonged to their masters. And Justice Thomas’ ancestors were bought and sold without regard to family connections.

In Judaism, knowing one’s genealogy is critical. In my January 10 sermon, “First Things First,” we looked at the various ways in which each gospel opened. The Gospel of Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus by way of Joseph. Luke opens with the genealogy of Jesus by way of Mary. John simply tells us that Jesus came from God. In contrast, the Gospel of Mark provides no lineage for Jesus at all. In doing so, Mark equates Jesus with a common slave. If you’re a slave, nobody cares who your parents were. You’re just a slave; you have no pedigree.

But despite the fact that Mark begins his gospel by equating Jesus with a common slave, that beginning comes with a subtle but significant irony, and it’s found in verse 15, which Kathleen read last week.

Mark 1:15 gives us the very first words uttered by Jesus in this gospel. And in the writings of the Ancient Near East, first words are critical; they establish priority.

The first words uttered by Jesus tell us the priority of Jesus and in the Gospel of Mark, the priority of Jesus is stated in verse 15:

<sup>15</sup> “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

The kingdom of God has come near. In other words, this man without a pedigree—this man without parentage; this servant; this slave; this Jesus—has a kingdom! Remember, as a child, Jesus was taken to Egypt to escape the jealous wrath of King

Herod: Jesus was a refugee. As an adult, Jesus “had no place to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20): Jesus was homeless. And yet, in one of the greatest ironies of human history, this nobody, this homeless slave has a kingdom.

That fact brings us face-to-face with one of the most important truths concerning the kingdom of God and it is this: The kingdom of God is embodied in the Person of Jesus Christ. Jesus was able to say that the kingdom of God has come near because he had arrived. I don’t mean that he had simply shown up. Rather, the Word of God—the living expression of God—had become flesh and had come to dwell among us.

The Nicene Creed says it this way—and remember, St. Nicolas helped shape the Nicene Creed: “For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.” The kingdom of God came to earth. That means that if you want to get close to the kingdom of God, then you’ll have to get close to Jesus Christ, because wherever Jesus is, that’s where you’ll find the kingdom of God. If you find Jesus, you’ve found the kingdom of God. **The kingdom of God is embodied in the Person of Jesus Christ.** So when we pray, “Thy kingdom come,” we are really praying for Christ to come to us.

Perhaps one of the longest teachings about the kingdom of God is found in Matthew 13 where Jesus gives seven parables about the Kingdom of heaven. Now, there may be some nuances of difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven, but for our purposes today, I’m going to use the two phrases interchangeably.

As you read those seven parables, it becomes clear that the kingdom of God is meant to grow; it is meant to draw others; it is meant to sort the good from the bad; it is meant to sort the genuine from the imposter; and finally, it is meant to enrich your life. But notice, too, that the kingdom of God originates in the heart of God. In other words, **the kingdom of God is embodied in the mission of Jesus Christ.**

According to ¶120 of our *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, “The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” And that is absolutely true. However, we must keep in mind that the only reason we have a mission is because Jesus had a mission.

I love the picture of Christ that we find in Luke 9:

<sup>51</sup> When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup> And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; <sup>53</sup> but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem (NRSV).

Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem.” Jesus had a mission. And he knew how he would have to fulfill it. His mission was to go to Jerusalem and die as a sacrifice for the

sins of the world. He knew what lay before him. And yet, that knowledge did not deter him. "He set his face to go to Jerusalem. Nothing was going to knock him off course from his mission.

Yes, the church has a mission, but the reason we have a mission is because Christ has a mission. And the reason Christ has a mission is because God the Father has a mission: God the Father "gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life."

If the kingdom of God is embodied in the mission of Jesus Christ, and if the mission of Jesus Christ is to "take away the sins of the world," then clearly one gains citizenship into the kingdom of God by having one's sins forgiven and believing in the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That brings us back to Mark 1:15, "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Are you a citizen of the kingdom of heaven? If you have repented of your sin and believed the gospel, then welcome to the kingdom of God! Through repentance and believe, you have helped Jesus to fulfill his mission!

The church has a mission because Jesus has a mission. And Jesus has a mission because God has a mission. And as Jesus fulfilled his Father's mission, "The kingdom of God came near." The kingdom of God is connected to the mission of God.

So when we pray, "Thy kingdom come," what are we really praying? We're praying that God would fulfill his mission. But it's not just giving God a pat on the back and saying, "Keep up the good work, God. I like what you're doing." No. It's "God, carry out your mission in me." It's our way of saying, "God, I will be a willing participant in your mission to the world."

Thankfully, we don't have to go it alone. Our God with a mission sent Jesus into the world with a mission. Paul writes:

<sup>3</sup> For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

As a direct result of that "good news," our God who sends has sent the Holy Spirit to us in order to enable us to participate in God's mission.

Sometimes we get the mistaken idea that God's mission is just about getting warm bodies on cold pews. I'll admit it: I've fallen into that way of thinking at times. Unfortunately, it's not that simple. The kingdom of God is not just about numbers.

Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose Driven Church*, writes, "One of the impressive characteristics of Jesus' ministry was that it attracted crowds. Large crowds. Enormous crowds." However, what Rick Warren neglects is the fact that those crowds dissipated as soon as Jesus stopped meeting their needs by feeding or healing them.

That goes back to what I said in my first message in this series. We sometimes get the mistaken idea that the purpose of the church is to meet the needs of the church members. Wrong. The purpose of the church is to glorify God and one of the ways that we glorify God is by participating in God's mission. When we do, then we have become an active member of the kingdom of God. But be forewarned: **the kingdom of God is embodied in the suffering of Jesus Christ.**

Those enormous crowds which flocked to Jesus as he skewered the Pharisees and the Sadducees; those enormous crowds when he fed them and healed them; those enormous crowds all bailed once Jesus started demanding radical obedience to his kingdom:

Some years ago, as part of my seminary experience, I took a class on the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke. One of the objectives of the class was to explore what the kingdom of God meant to three different believers with very different perspectives on the Kingdom of God. The first was a well-published theologian. The second was a Bible scholar who was also well-published. Both the theologian and the Bible scholar had enjoyed illustrious careers as seminary professors.

The third was just a Baptist preacher named Dr. Martin Luther King. Since he had never written a commentary, we relied on a collection of his sermons bound together in a book called, *Strength to Love*, which I've referenced often over the course of these past few weeks.

Throughout the fifteen sermons which comprised that collection, it became clear that the kingdom of God is not just about meeting the so-called minimum requirement of repentance. Rather, the kingdom of God embodied justice for all people regardless of the color of their skin.

That's a truth rooted in the gospels for **the kingdom of God is embodied in the justice of Jesus Christ.** Jesus proclaimed the good news without respect to persons. He proclaimed the good news to the poor. He proclaimed liberty for those who were locked in prisons of injustice and poverty. He brought sight to those who were blind physically as well as socially. Jesus came to set the oppressed free.

When a gang of Pharisees brought a woman to Jesus to be stoned because she had been caught—alone! —in adultery, Jesus intimidated her accusers until they left. Then he offered her forgiveness and the chance at a new life.

He ate with sinners and welcomed the marginalized and the outcasts of society. He treated women and children with dignity. Truly, the kingdom of God embodies the justice of Jesus Christ.

Finally, it's important to realize that there is a "now" and a "not yet" to the kingdom of God. Thanks to the life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God is a present reality. But without question, the kingdom of God is not complete and

will not be complete until the end of the age. But when this age comes to an end—when the heavens and the earth pass away—God’s kingdom will stand firm. And we will remain its citizens because **the Kingdom of God is embodied in the destiny of Jesus Christ.**

Remember what I said about suffering? Paul writes to Timothy:

If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him (1 Timothy 2:11b-12a).

Likewise, he writes to the church at Rome:

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. (Romans 6:8).

The kingdom of God is now because our God is a “now” God. The kingdom of God is here because our God is a “here” God. And our here and now God sent his Son to us to bring us the kingdom of heaven. But also, to bring us into the kingdom of heaven. That’s the not yet part.

Peter wrote in chapter 1 of his first epistle:

<sup>10</sup> Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, <sup>11</sup> and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Like a diamond with many facets, there are many facets to the kingdom of God. But those facets have one thing in common: each facet is connected to Jesus Christ—his person, his mission, his suffering, his justice, and ultimately, his destiny. Each facet is a reflection of the Son of God. And when we pray, “Thy kingdom come,” we are praying that we would be connected to the person of Jesus Christ. We are praying to be a part of the mission of Jesus Christ. We are praying that we would reflect Christ in our homes, in our schools, in our workplaces and in our neighborhoods. We are praying that God’s justice would “roll down like waters,” and God’s righteousness flow “like an ever-flowing stream.” We are even praying that we might share in his suffering so that we might ultimately share in his destiny.