

On Earth as It Is in Heaven

Revelation 7:9-10 and 21:22-26

Luke 11:1-13

This is week 2 in our series on the Lord's Prayer, taking one phrase at a time each week. Last week: "*Father (mother) in heaven, hallowed be your name*" (i.e., reveal yourself to me, to us, to the world). This morning: "*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*" The phrase "on earth as it is in heaven" belongs with both of the lines that come before it, so it could be read this way: your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven; your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

This morning's text is Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer, with the parable and the teaching that follow it.

11 He (Jesus) 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.'² He said to them, 'When you pray, pray in this way: Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴ And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.'

⁵ And he said to them, 'Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, "Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him."⁷ And he answers from within, "Do not bother me; the door has already been locked,

and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.”⁸I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

9 ‘So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.¹¹Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish?¹²Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion?¹³If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!’

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

Begin with a reminder: in every place where Jesus teaches on prayer, he gives us totally non-religious words to use, non-religious language to describe prayer. Ask, seek, knock. That’s not exactly religious language! A friend knocking on someone’s door at midnight doesn’t describe a religious practice—as in a similar parable Jesus tells, where a woman pesters a judge until she gets justice. This is everyday language, using everyday illustrations. And in both illustrations the protagonist is obnoxious. Jesus describes prayer as being like an obnoxious person in approaching God! That’s as non-religious as it gets!

Like we talked about last week, Jesus relieves us of having to find the right words, or of saying a lot of them, getting the formula right, standing on ceremony, or making sure our attitude is just so. The guy knocking on his friend’s door in the middle of the night is annoying; so is the woman who is bugging the

judge until she gets justice. This is not formality. It's simplicity, it's honesty, it's boldness in God's presence.

And the simple and bold part of the Lord's Prayer that we are looking at this morning is: your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

And to start, I'd like to step back for a moment and ponder a question, because it will inform and encourage us in our praying: Why did Jesus pray?

Luke tells us, earlier in chapter 5, as all the gospel writers do, that "*Jesus often withdrew to places alone and prayed.*" And in our reading this morning from Luke 11 he tells us again that Jesus was praying in a certain place. Why did he pray? Why did **HE** need to pray? After all, Jesus is God in the flesh. Is he praying to himself? If he's God and therefore all-knowing and all powerful, why does he need to pray?

The simple answer is: he was human. He was a real human being like us. "The word became flesh and dwelt among us," (John 1:14) as one of us. Remember the apostle Paul's great affirmation in Philippians 2:6-7, that: "*though he was in very nature God, he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*"

So, the Jesus we encounter in Scripture was a real human being, with real human needs. He got tired, he got hungry, he needed sleep, he needed companionship, he felt and expressed strong emotions.

Therefore, Jesus relied on his relationship with God his heavenly Father to sustain him. And to give him his identity and purpose and calling, to give wisdom and strength.

So Jesus prayed, and prayed often. What a great assurance! This isn't a superhuman activity, and doesn't require superhuman effort. Jesus needed to hear from his heavenly Father; Jesus needed his daily bread, spiritually; he undoubtedly had requests to make; he needed to listen and receive guidance (for example, he prayed all night before calling his 12 disciples). He needed spiritual insight, and vision. All of these things *Jesus* needed; and... we need them too.

In John 5:19 Jesus said, "I do what I see the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, I do likewise." So, Jesus had to pray "Your will be done. Your kingdom come." In other words, "Reveal to me what your will is and where your Kingdom is being made manifest on earth, so I can act on that & join in that work."

Again, Jesus prayed, and prayed often. His disciples saw it, and saw John the Baptist teaching his disciples to pray, so they said, “Hey, we want in on this too. Teach *us* to pray.” And Jesus seemed very eager to answer their request to teach them about prayer. Glad you asked! Jesus said.

And in Jesus’ teaching about prayer—both the Lord’s Prayer and all the other teachings and parables—he reveals several things about the nature of God—the heart of God, what makes God’s heart beat, as mentioned last week—and this revealing of God’s heart gives us encouragement as we respond to the open invitation to pray. And pray more, as we learn more about who this heavenly Father/Mother who gives good gifts to us children.

This morning I’d like to focus on one aspect of God’s nature, or God’s ways, which Jesus reveals in our line from the Lord’s Prayer for this morning:

This teaching reveals that *God the Father is the primary actor*, in our lives and in the world. Not Emmy Award winning actor for great television performance, or Academy Award winning actor; not that kind of actor—but the one whose *action is primary*, who acts *first*, who *initiates* action. In the Lord’s Prayer, both Matthew’s version (which is the unabridged version that churches use in their worship), and in Luke’s version, the petitions in the prayer are

requests for God to do something that only God can do. They are requests for God to do something that only God can do.

Grammatically, these petitions are all in the imperative mood, passive voice. Imperative mood, passive voice. This means, they are more like humble commands than requests for assistance. They are bold and audacious (that's the imperative mood: "Do this! Make it happen!"), and they reflect that God is who does the work (that's the passive voice: "May it be done!").

If we were hearing this, as Jesus' disciples did, in the Greek language in which it's spoken, it would be heard this way: "Be hallowed, your name! Make come, your Kingdom! Be done, your will!" In effect, Jesus is teaching us to pray: Father: you do it, you do it, you do it! On earth as it is in heaven. Eugene Peterson in the Message: "Set the world right; do what's best. As above, so below."

And the Lord's prayer is phrased this way by Jesus as a way of telling us that only God can do what we are praying to have done. We are not asking God to make *us* make his Kingdom to come, as if it's dependent upon us. We're indeed swept into those things, and participate in them, but that is not the nature of the prayer. Only God can bring the Kingdom, only God can ensure that his will is

done. That's why Jesus said "I only do what I see the Father doing..." because God is really the one who acts; and we follow, as Jesus did.

Again, in the Lord's Prayer we are not praying, primarily, "Let *us* make your kingdom come; let *us* make your will to be done." Rather, what are praying in the Lord's Prayer is, "You bring your kingdom because only you can. You cause your will to be done, because only you can."

This is a grace gift, this teaching on prayer, because it saves us from the anxiety of thinking that those things won't happen unless ***we make them*** happen. History should teach us that wherever God's people have tried to *make* God's Kingdom come, and *enforce* God's will to be done—because they think it's their job to make it happen—it has resulted in some bad things like crusades, and burning people at the stake, and other less awful things, but unhelpful nonetheless. We don't make God's kingdom come; we don't force God's will to be done. We look for where God is on the move, where God is already bringing the Kingdom to earth, and we join in that work. We are active participants, but not the primary actors. God is. Like in Phil.1: "God, who began a good work, will bring it to completion." It's God's work.

The temptation for many of us, even though we are praying “*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done*” is to mean, “*My will be done.*” And that’s when things start to go sideways. Because God’s will is sometimes mysterious, and doesn’t always follow our logic, or what we want to happen or think should happen, or when.

God is the primary actor. God the Father is powerful and only God can do what we are asking to have done.

Therefore, we come to God the Father as participants and responders. As we pray this prayer over time, we see where God’s Kingdom is breaking in, and we respond. We see where God’s will is being done, and we respond. We respond with action, but also with gratitude that we **get to** participate in fulfilling God’s work in the world. We begin to be able to say, with Jesus, “I do what I see the Father doing; whatever the Father does, I do likewise,” as God makes his Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

And just what is God’s Kingdom that we’re humbly petitioning him to bring? Well, that’s a whole sermon series in itself. Because Jesus’ favorite topic is the Kingdom of heaven (or, “Kingdom of God”—same thing), and he talked about it a lot. It’s too vast and broad to try to explain in one part of one sermon, but if

you want to follow up on what the Kingdom of heaven is, read Jesus' parables. Because almost all of them begin with the phrase, "The Kingdom of heaven is like..." In order to explain the kingdom of heaven to us, Jesus tells stories and gives illustrations. So it comes to us in images and stories.

It's like someone asking, "What is the universe?" We could come up with a scientific answer which would be technically correct, but it wouldn't be adequate to describe all of the vast and dynamic aspects of what's happening out there. But if we answer the question "What is the universe?" the way Jesus explains the *Kingdom*, we would answer the question something like this: "The universe is like this 7-planet solar system over here..." and, "the universe is like this nebula over there, which is birthing new stars and creating other solar systems" and, "the universe is like this comet that has an odd elliptical orbit" and "the universe is like dark matter that we can't see, but exerts its gravitational pull on everything" and so on and so on and so on. Each of those is *part* of the universe, but is not the universe in its entirety. It's the same with the Kingdom of God. It's vast and dynamic in what it is and how it works, which boggles the mind, the way God's will sometimes does.

And so throughout the gospels Jesus paints a picture—or several pictures, actually. The Kingdom of heaven is like this (a farmer sowing seeds), and like this

(a woman making bread), and like this (a mustard seed that grows into a huge shrub), and like this (a shepherd who had 100 sheep and loses one of them and goes in search of it). It's brilliant. Because it saves us from small-mindedness about it. We get simple, clear, but numerous illustrations.

Yet just as the universe is basically about certain elements and the laws of physics, the Kingdom of God is basically about God's will being done. The humble petitions for God's kingdom to come, and God's will to be done, are two ways of saying the same thing. And God's will is always about justice, righteousness, love, peace, joy. The fruit of the Spirit.

And we pray that it be done on earth as it's being done in heaven. And how is it being done in heaven? What is happening there? We heard glimpses of it from the passages that Bethany read from Revelation. And we must take note of the most prominent feature: all the nations are there, as equals: "every nation, tribe, people, and language" (literally 'cultures' or 'ethnic groups'). And, "The glory and honor of the nations" are brought into the heavenly city. In heaven, cultural diversity is preserved and celebrated. There is peace, safety, redemption, and all of the great things from creation and culture are not only carried into heaven, they are celebrated there!

So when we pray that God's will and God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven, that means we're praying for God to bring healing and reconciliation and a level playing field to every "nation, tribe, people and language" on earth. That's why Christians who say they follow Jesus Christ but act in ways that are discriminatory, racist, who uphold one country or people as superior or as God's chosen, are acting *against* heaven, and against what they are supposedly praying in the Lord's Prayer. Against what God is doing!

Conversely, if someone wants to prepare for heaven now, one way to do that is to experience and celebrate cultural/ethnic diversity. Because that's what heaven will be like! One aspect of it, that is.

Jesus tells us God's will is being accomplished in heaven, and we are asking God to make it so *on earth* as well. Make it real in human lives, and in social structures, and in the environment. Notice Jesus did not teach us to pray "Your kingdom come *in our hearts* as in heaven" or "your kingdom come *in the church* as in heaven," but "on earth" as in heaven. It spans the globe, and therefore societies, which again tells us that Jesus wants us to lift our eyes and our vision up and out, to see what God is doing *in the world*, and pray that God's will may be

done *in the world*. Yes, in our hearts; yes, in the church—those are part of it; an important part, but *only* a part. The invitation is to think globally, though.

And that's why it's so important for us to pray for the world, and pray frequently for the world. Our response to the news and to the events taking place is to pray. And again, as we see God's will being done, we celebrate it, and pray about the ways we may join in that work and participate in God's renewing work in the world.

May it be so!

Reminder: we're inviting everyone to pray one line of the prayer every day during the week. Our phrase this week, to pray each day, or throughout each day: your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Maybe, "As above, so below." Or, "Give me eyes to see where your will is being done; where your Kingdom is breaking in."