

Teach Us to Pray: 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 Lenten 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.o.w., 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.*"

Our next reading this morning is Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer, with the short parable and the teaching that follow it. Luke's version is much shorter, and see what else you notice is different from the version we use each week (which is based on Matthew's version).

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.'²He 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."⁷And 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, even though 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. A reminder which brings us great encouragement: in every place where Jesus teaches on prayer, he gives us totally non-religious words to use; non-religious language to describe prayer. In this morning’s teaching he says, “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 (Heidi and I 😊) 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 sincerity, 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.

Before we dive into that, I'd like to step back for a moment and ponder a question, because it will inform and encourage us in our praying. That is: 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. If he's God and therefore all-knowing and all powerful, why does he need to pray?

The simple answer is: Jesus needed to pray because he was human. He was a real human being like us. Every Christmas we read from John 1 and celebrate that "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us," as one of us. We also remember the apostle Paul's great affirmation about Jesus 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.” Let me repeat that...

So, the Jesus we encounter in Scripture was a real human being, with real human needs. He got tired, he got hungry, he got snarky on occasion, 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; and 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, just like we do. Jesus needed his daily bread, spiritually and materially, just like we do. He undoubtedly had requests to make, just like we do. He needed to listen and receive guidance. For example, he prayed all night before calling his 12 disciples. So he needed guidance, just like we need guidance. He needed spiritual insight, and vision. All of these things *Jesus* needed. And, of course, we need them too.

In John's gospel (5:19), Jesus says to his followers, "I can do nothing on my own, but only what I see the Father doing." That's a very important line. "I can

do nothing on my own, but only what I see the Father doing.” Jesus (as a human, like us) decided that any action he would take would be based on what he saw God the Father doing. 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 the good effect it had for him, and they 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 says.

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 to want to pray *more*, as we learn more about who this heavenly Father/Mother is, 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 is the primary actor*, in our lives and in the world. Not 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, in both Matthew's version and 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 the one who does the work (that's the passive voice: "May it be done!").

If we were hearing this, as Jesus' disciples did, in the native tongue in which it's spoken, it would be heard this way: "Father in heaven: 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 translates it this way 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 are indeed swept into those things, and participate in them, but that is not the nature of the prayer. It is God who is the primary actor and initiator of those things. That's why Jesus said in John 5: "I only do what I see our 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, "Please bring your kingdom because only you can. Please cause your will to be done, because only you can." And then we try to live with open eyes and with awareness to see what we are asking God to do.

This is a grace gift, this teaching on prayer, because it saves us from the anxiety or expectation 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 *force* God's will to be done—because they think it's their job to make it happen—it has resulted in some bad things... some horrible things like crusades, and burning people at the stake, and other

less awful things, but unhelpful nonetheless. And, even when Christians have all good intentions and believe they are helping others and “helping” God by rushing headlong into action to help or fix something or someone, that has the potential to cause more harm than help. Because the danger in that is that ego and a desire for power & control begin to move in, because people think they are doing God’s will.

We’re seeing this at play right now in our nation’s politics, as certain elected people think it’s their job to make the Bible, and their understanding of God’s will and whatnot, into public policy, as if that’s what the Bible is for or that’s how Christianity is to be practiced. Which it isn’t. Our founders were wise to separate church and state. The New Testament is very clear about that.

For example, in Romans 13 Paul is instructing the Christians to be good citizens in Rome. He, in his own words, reiterates Jesus’ line to “render to Caesar that which is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” He never encourages the Christians to try to take over government, or Christianize it, but to live within it as citizens of God’s kingdom of righteousness, joy and peace. Then he boils the entire Old Testament law down to one law (“the fulfilling of the law,” is what he calls it): love your neighbor as yourself. *Jesus* boiled all the commandments

down to 2: Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and, love your neighbor as yourself. So, those who want to do things like post the 10 commandments in public spaces are misguided. It's like they've never read the gospels and the rest of the New Testament. If we're *going to* post commandments, only two should be posted, the ones Jesus said were the greatest, which fulfill the law: love God, love neighbor. But they *shouldn't* be posted because we're not meant to force or enforce God's will, or God's kingdom. Both Jesus and the apostle Paul reframed the entire Jewish law and the gospel as *invitations* to love, not as old regulations to obey with the name Christianity slapped on as a label. Jesus taught his followers to ask, seek, knock—not enforce, dictate, or control. He taught humble prayer and servant action, not an exercise of power in God's name.

Yes, Christians can hold public office. That can be a calling. But it's a calling to be a public *servant*, in the way of Jesus, which is the way of love, and, dare I say, mercy.

So... we don't *make* God's kingdom come; we don't *force* God's will to be done. Even when there are good intentions. We take our good intentions prayerfully to God, and 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, when Paul says: “*God, who began a good work, will bring it to completion.*” It’s God’s work.

And if we want clues as to where God’s will is being done, and where God’s kingdom is breaking in, look for these: look for signs of *life*; look for signs of *hope*; look for signs of *joy*; look for signs of *community and wellbeing in community*; look for signs of *healing*; look for signs of *justice being done*; look for signs of *rich diversity* (I’ll talk about that more in a moment). Most of all, look for signs of *love*. Because, God... is... love. It’s in the Bible! 1John 4:8: God is love. Therefore, the kingdom of God is love, and God’s will is love made manifest.

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

Therefore, we come to God humbly, 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. Again, it’s usually life-giving, joyful, loving and healing activity. Then we respond with action, but also with gratitude that we *get to* participate in God’s work in the world. We begin to be able to say, with Jesus, “I do what I see the Father doing;

and 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 brilliant.

It’s like someone asking, “What is the universe?” One way to answer that is to ask Neil deGrasse Tyson to come up with a scientific answer which would be technically correct according to the laws of physics, 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*, it would sound something like this: “The universe is like this 7-planet solar system over here in the Milky Way galaxy,” 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 a tail,” and “the universe is like dark matter that we can’t actually 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 vast and dynamic in what it is and how it works, it’s awe-inspiring, and there are sometimes surprises in how it *doesn’t* follow the laws of physics. Like God’s kingdom and God’s will, sometimes.

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 big shrub), and like this (a shepherd who has 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. It helps us imagine the vast, beautiful, life-giving reality that is God’s Kingdom.

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. That’s why the prayer for God’s kingdom to come and God’s will to be done are two ways of saying the same thing.

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 John read from Revelation. And we must take note of the most prominent feature: all the nations are there, as equals. It says: "every nation, tribe, people, and language" (literally all of the 'cultures' or 'ethnic groups') are present. And, "The glory and honor of the nations" are brought into the heavenly city. In heaven, cultural diversity is preserved and honored 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 be present on earth as it is in heaven, that means we're praying for God to bring healing among nations, and reconciliation among ethnic groups, 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, prejudicial, domineering and tyrannical, and 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. They are praying against what God is actually doing!

Conversely, if someone wants to prepare for heaven now, one way to do that is to experience and celebrate cultural/ethnic diversity here and now. Because that's what heaven will be like! One aspect of it, that is. One snarky Bible commentator said that if you don't like cultural and ethnic diversity now, heaven will be *painful* for you. However, if you like it and celebrate it now, you're gonna love the party!

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 communities and neighborhoods, 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 our neighborhoods and communities, 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 then act. 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. Or, "Give me eyes to see where your will is being done; where your Kingdom is breaking in." Maybe simply pray, "As above, so below."

Song: *What is the World Like*—based on the parables of the Kingdom