

FOLLOWERS OF THE WAY: "Are You Sure You Are Ready for That?"
October 23, 2016 by W.J. Schneider

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St. Matthew 6:7-9a

"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come . . ."

Hey! Just a doggone minute! Did I say "*Thy kingdom come?*" Really? Now? This very moment? Are we sure we are ready for that?

Perhaps we should pray for the kingdom to show up some day, but just not today. Our reluctance may be because we are not certain what the kingdom is or will be like. We might not recognize it if it came up and bit us on our ear! Our differing levels of anxiety may be driven by our fear that everything will be changed. And, as we know, the thing our ego hates more than anything is change.

As I mentioned last Sunday, the Israelis were looking for a new political system under God's rule rather than Caesar's. And today it sometimes appears that a universal benevolent world ruler is attractive.

Which leads me to recall the many historical groups who have invited people to sell everything and join a prophet on hillsides or in Ghana, waiting for the kingdom to come. And, of course, nothing good comes from that. One of their problems is they were waiting for God to do the work. God would grant the kingdom to them gratis, for free. There would be no entrance exam, no requirements, no pre-requisites.

These folks misunderstood the grace and forgiveness of God and confused it with the Kingdom of God. Today, like each period since Jesus ascended, there are people who believe that 'since God loves them unconditionally,' they may continue to sin all they desire. Obviously, they have not read the Book of Romans!

St. Paul's answer to this false belief is, "***What shall we say then? Should we continue to live in sin so that God's grace will increase? Of course, not! We have died to sin; how can we go on living in it?***"

When we pray "*Thy kingdom come*" what are we asking for? While it is true that God's love and forgiveness is unconditional, the kingdom's coming does require that we live like Jesus, practicing unconditional love. The degree that we have accepted God's grace and forgiveness is the degree that we are unchained to manage our actions and relationships. The coming of God's kingdom depends on our obedience to God's call to live like Jesus.

There is a plaque on the wall near our church's kitchen serving window, given to our church from the Heifer Project for our donations. The Heifer Project is a United Methodist program that donates animals to people around our world. The recipients are taught the use and breeding of the animal, to produce food for their family. The animal is a gift but its use requires responsible stewardship.

At the beginning of this sermon we cannot stop reading too soon. This is what Jesus is teaching us: "***Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.***" These are not separate things. For the kingdom to be actualized on earth, it must happen here, right now, this moment. This was not a plan where God woke up today and said, "*Today is a good day for it.*" God has had this plan on the drafting board since creation began.

It is what is at work when we leave worship today, when we eat our meals, when we shop, even when we cast our votes. God's goal is to bring the Kingdom on earth every day of our lives including our last day.

This is why each generous action; every expression of unconditional love assists the coming of the Kingdom. As Stanley Fry says, "***Where Grace lives that's where God rules.***" When placing our votes for those public leaders who write and support legislation that protect and empower the lives of those who have been abused or misused or

oppressed, there the Kingdom is coming. When people are protected from violence, the Kingdom is coming.

When the church reaches out in love to her community with need-meeting actions, it is the Kingdom of God's grace in action. Each kind word, the smallest gesture of warmth brings the Kingdom. None of these (and a multitude of others) are ever offered with any expectation of personal gain. They are the daily working out of Jesus' Beatitudes and the following of the Sermon on the Mount. They are the signs of God's grace building the Kingdom through your hands.

So, to pray for the Kingdom to come, is to ask God for the wisdom and the courage to live the life of grace. The remaining portion of the Lord's Prayer ask for the four requirements necessary for living in grace:

One: "***Give us this day our daily bread.***" Here, we ask for strength and health for living, the necessities of life.

Two: "***Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespasses against us.***" Never let us forget that we have been forgiven everything. Please allow this knowledge to move us to forgive those who have hurt us as we have hurt others.

Three: "***Lead us not into temptation***": Please God, keep us from our tendency to stray from your pathway.

Four: "***And deliver us from evil***": There is so much evil around us; greed, prejudice, sloth, fear of what others think, selfishness, pride. These, and others, are enemies of unconditional love.

Wherever grace abides, God rules and God's Kingdom is coming now, and someday it will come in its fullness. Jesus only taught us one prayer, a prayer for the coming of the Kingdom of God, right now. Please God, let it be so with each of us. Alleluia. Amen.