

***Epiphany Sermon Series: “The Lord’s Prayer”***  
***Sermon Title: Please, Lord!***  
***I Samuel 8:4-18; Psalm 23; Matthew 6:7-13; Luke 11:1-4***  
***Salem United Methodist Church***  
***January 31, 2016***  
***Rev. Dr. Sue Shorb-Sterling***

Two Sundays ago we began a sermon series on The Lord’s Prayer as we examined the first part of the prayer, “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” Today we will continue with the phrases, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.” The Lord’s Prayer is the best known Christian prayer. We pray it every Sunday. Many times we pray it without thinking about the words. The purpose of this sermon series is to help us understand what we really are praying.

Jesus gave us this prayer and made sure that when we pray we are committing our allegiance to God with this phrase, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” When you hear the word, “king,” or “kingdom,” what is the first word that pops into your head? As citizens of a democratic country, we may find the words, “king” or “kingdom,” offensive. These words bring thoughts of tyrants and dictators. Our nation began because we said, “No,” to an English king. Our human history is filled with monarchies and empires. The leaders of these had or have absolute power. Many abuse(d) their power by oppressing their subjects. Some are overthrown by those they oppressed, too. Early in the life of Israel, God was their Sovereign. God had made a covenant with the Israelites that God would be their God, their ruler who would lead, protect, save, and provide for them. The people were in turn to be obedient to God’s will and follow his Rule of Love. With God as their King, there was no need for earthly kings. This was God’s will for them-to not have an earthly king. Then the Israelites realized that their neighboring nations had earthly kings and they wanted one, too. So they asked their spiritual leader, Samuel, to give them a king. The Israelites rejected God as their King so they could have an earthly king. God warned them that their kings would take their children, their land, and their resources to serve the king and fight his battles. And the kings did. God’s will for the Israelites was a different kind of Kingdom.

This different Kingdom becomes the theme of Jesus’ teachings and his life. What is this Kingdom? First, it is not a place, but it is a gift and a promise. The gift is that in God’s Kingdom, everything that is broken will be made whole. Wounded hearts and bodies will receive healing. Creation will be renewed. The fullness of God’s creative and redemptive power reigns. God’s rule is one of love and grace. The promise is that the Kingdom of God is the opposite of earthly kingdoms. Enemies become friends. Sinners are forgiven. The lost are found. The exalted are humbled and the humbled are exalted. The first are last and the last are first. Implements of war are turned into tools for sustaining life. No one is in need. There is plenty for all. There is no pain, no suffering, no crying, and no dying. There is peace, love, joy, and hope. Another aspect of God’s Kingdom is that it is timeless. It exists in our past, present, and future. It is both here, now, and yet to come. The first statement Jesus makes in the Mark’s Gospel is that the Kingdom is near (Mark 1:15). Repeatedly in all four Gospels Jesus proclaims the Kingdom is near, or here, or among us, or within us. When the Pharisees asked Jesus when the Kingdom of God was coming, his response to them was that it was already within them or among them (Luke 17:21-22). In his teachings, Jesus constantly talks about the Kingdom. He uses metaphors, similes, and parables to paint a picture of what it is like. God’s Kingdom is compared to small, insignificant items that have great worth, such as mustard seeds, yeast, hidden treasure have great worth. In his daily life, Jesus shows us God’s Kingdom through healing and performing miracles. Who wouldn’t want to live in a Kingdom of Love, Peace, Joy? So Jesus teaches us to pray, “Your kingdom come.” In Advent, we say this words, “Come, Lord Jesus, come.” Our hearts, minds, souls, and even our bodies yearn for God’s Kingdom to come, to break into our world filled with pain, suffering, and hate.

Have you ever noticed that Jesus didn’t teach us to pray, “My kingdom come,” but God’s? Yet, often we pray for “My kingdom,” and “my will.” We want God to answer our prayers the way we want

them answered. Even Jesus prayed for his will to be done and not God's before he was arrested. Even the Son of God struggled with God's will when he was facing his Crucifixion. So when you hear the term, "God's will," what comes to mind? What is God's will? It is not God's will for people to die or be killed. It is not God's will to have disasters, famines, or wars. If we understand the Kingdom of God, we may be able to begin to understand the will of God. The will of God is to bring and to create the Kingdom of God on earth. Even so, we need a process to discern God's will. We can begin by conversing with God, asking and listening. We can consult the Scriptures, and talk with trusted spiritual friends. Discerning God's will is only part of our responsibility as citizens of God's Kingdom. Once we have an inkling of what God's will is, then we are to align our will with God's will-Thy will, not mine. We are to seek God's Kingdom, to create and live in God's Kingdom, and to extend God's Kingdom into the world. As committed followers of Jesus, God's Kingdom is to be our top priority. When we pray the words, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," we are pledging allegiance to God's kingdom. Our allegiance is to God comes before our allegiance to any flag, any country, and even our commitment to our families. Do you see why we should not take these words lightly? Every phrase of The Lord's Prayer can hold its challenges for us, but this one is probably the most challenging to uphold. We are committed to other allegiances that sometimes we substitute them for our allegiance to God. Or we get our allegiances mixed up, sometimes to the point where we forget or drop our allegiance to God.

When Jesus organized this prayer, he made sure that we would honor God and petition for God to reign before we ask anything for ourselves. Have you ever noticed that before? The next part of the prayer is "Give us this day our daily bread." These words are reminiscent of God giving the Hebrew people their daily manna in the wilderness. Each day there was a fresh batch waiting to be collected. However, some might like to pray for something else besides bread. There is a Dennis the Menace cartoon in which he is sitting in church with his parents. Dennis asks his mother, "How come we ask for our "daily bread" when we could ask for "daily donuts?" Most of us have not experienced the not-knowing when we will get our next bread or meal. We have too much bread. It grows mold as we strive to curb our intake of carbs. Like the rest of the prayer this petition does not have the first person singular pronouns, "me," or "my," but the first person plural pronouns, "us," or "our." For those of us who have too much to eat, we are praying for those who do not. And in so doing, we are reminded to share with those who don't. My mother-in-law's maiden name was Daley. Her parents who were immigrants from Ireland had very little money. When she was a girl, there were days when they didn't have bread. When The Lord's Prayer was prayed, she wondered why people were asking for her family's bread when they had so little themselves. Feeding those who are hungry is participating in God's Kingdom. Jesus also said, "For I was hungry and you gave me food to eat" (Matthew 25:35). Our Sovereign King created a world that has enough food so no one should go hungry except for the fact that we hoard it for ourselves. This petition reminds us that our lives depend on God. Yes, there is a physical aspect to this petition, but it can also be interpreted spiritually. Jesus said in the Gospel of John that "I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry" (John 6:35). And, "This is the bread that came down from heaven. It isn't like the bread your ancestors ate, and then they died. Whoever eats this bread will live forever" (John 6:58). He was referring to himself as this Living Bread. We acknowledge this every time we bring ordinary bread to the Communion Table and the pastor prays "The Great Thanksgiving." This bread that we may eat for lunch is transformed into the mystical, holy Body of Christ. This sacramental bread unites us with one another and reminds us again of the sacrificial love God has for us through Jesus Christ. A transformed loaf of bread is one way in which God's Kingdom is near, here, among us, and within us. Whether we interpret this phrase literally or spiritually or both, with this phrase we acknowledge our dependence on God.

Praying the phrase, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us our daily bread," can be dangerous. It can change how we see the world and how we live in it.

**Resources:** *The Lord's Prayer* by Edward Bauman; *A Place to Pray* by Roberta Bondi; *God's Psychiatry* by Charles Allen; *The Upside-Down Kingdom* by Donald Kraybill; *Lord, Teach Us* by William Willimon & Stanley Hauerwas

