

Matthew 13:31-34, 44-46 ~ Matthew 6:25-33
Your Kingdom Come: Praying into Hope
 Second of Six-Sermon Series on The Lord's Prayer
 July 28, 2019 ~ Sixth Sunday after Pentecost ~ Service of Healing & Wholeness
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Introduction to Second Reading:

"Lord, teach us to pray." That was Luke's set up to the moment when Jesus gave his disciples what has come to be known as, "The Lord's Prayer," in Luke 11. The first petition, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name," I preached last Sunday as the "Tune my heart" opening petition, the one that gets us started by helping us remember to whom we are praying. It gives us words to help us realign our mud bound hearts, soul, minds with our eternal Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer God. The One who waits for us, yearns for us to keep asking, seeking, knocking. The God who stands ready to open new doors, new discoveries, provide new answers to old questions. And who sometimes even calls us from our boat, beckoning us to step out on the water, saying: "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid."

Now today, we move on to the second piece, "Your Kingdom Come." This tiny 3-word petition, packs a wallop that may have lost its edge for us over time. These three words can jolt us out of the hole we may have dug for ourselves—and jettison us up into the full future of God's vision. In Matthew, Jesus teaches the Lord's prayer smack in the middle of his sermon on the mount, in Matthew 6:9-13. Today's second scripture lesson starts at verse 25, with the phrase, "Therefore I tell you," where just after delivering the Lord's Prayer to this larger audience, he is teaching those gathered at his feet on the mountain how to pray, what to pray, why to pray. And he's getting personal. The folks listening to him, may be starting to squirm. He's leaning in and looking at them very intently as he starts talking about their relationship with money, food, and clothes—all that stuff we worry about too. I invite you to put your personal worry list aside. Just for a bit. At this moment, Jesus has something to say to your heart and mine. And it might even help you with that list. Let's have a listen.

Sermon:

How old were you when you started worrying? Some of us may consider ourselves to be "worry warts" or may have had others tell us, "You are such a worry wart! Chill out." My sister Lynn earned this title back when she was five years old after her first day of Kindergarten. When she came home from school, my mom noticed her furrowed brow and asked her, "Lynn, what's wrong? Did something bad happen at school?" Then it all came tumbling out, "My teacher gave each of us a brand-new box of crayons. At first, I was really excited to have this box of new crayons with all the colors, perfect points on all of them, none of them broken or missing—and the whole box was all for me! But then after she had passed the boxes out, she told us that this was the *only* box we were going to get for the whole school year. And we had to be really careful with them because if we broke them or lost them, we wouldn't get any more crayons for the whole year... What if I lose or break one of them? What do I do then?"

My mom acted quickly to solve the problem by going to the store that day and buying Lynn a back-up box of new crayons, just like the ones she had been given at school. She presented this box to Lynn and told her, "Now you have a whole second set of crayons here at home. If anything happens to your crayons at school, you don't have to worry because you know you have this box right here to replace everyone of them." There was a slight hesitation, but then the worried expression cast its shadow over her five-year old face again as she asked mom, "But what if I break *these* crayons?"

It may be true that all we really need to know we learned in Kindergarten, but I think most of us knew how to worry even before we hit the stresses and strains of Kindergarten. Worrying is not something we need to be taught. Of course, we all have different ways of worrying and different kinds of worries depending on what stage of life we may be in. From broken crayons to broken hearts; from broken promises to broken bodies: so much to worry about and so little time. If we don't consciously tune our hearts to God, we likely are stay tuned to the worry channel 24/7. Apparently, this is not a 21st century phenomenon. There were plenty of worry warts in Jesus' time, too. Not once, but twice in our passage Jesus says, "do not worry." He knew how to read a crowd and that's what he saw on their faces and in their hearts.

What are the top hits on your worry list? They may be the ones Jesus named right here: money, food, clothes. Add to that our health, our families, our jobs, our relationships, our nation, our world, our earth. And of course, you might be worried about how long the Brewer's starting pitcher, Gio Gonzalez may be out again on the injured list, since he was pulled out at the 7th inning during his best start of the season against the cubs on Friday night. Or you may be worried about the Packers first round draft pick, rookie Rashan Gary. We need him to come through with ZaDarius Smith, key to their defensive line this fall.

Whether it's our favorite sports team, or our most despised public figure that causes us anxiety: how do we break the habit? Jesus wants us off this worry train because there's something much more important he is calling us to put first on our hearts. Sure Jesus, but how can we possibly get off the worry train? This second petition of the Lord's prayer—yes, this three-word phrase, "Thy kingdom come" can help us out. It can shift us from worry to wonder, from living in fear to living on faith—no matter what our situation may be. We've prayed it so often we probably don't think about what those three words really mean. They actually contain the essence of the entire Lord's prayer. Like the mustard seed, the leaven, the one pearl: If we pray this one petition with all our hearts, and souls, and minds, and strength—with "fervent attention" as Augustine put it, it can leverage us out of our little, predictable, deeply-rutted "worry world" and into the large, well-lit, surprising realm of God's kingdom.

Jesus knew what those folks were like that day as they sat on that mountain, and Jesus knows what we are like today, sitting in these pews. We're always going to be striving for something. Did you notice: Jesus doesn't say stop striving. He does tell us to stop striving for the things that God has already promised you. Jesus tells them *to stop being worry-warts and start being kingdom-comers*. It's a turn of heart and mind open to us all.

With this prayer, "Thy kingdom come" we can begin to re-prioritize, re-vise, re-vision our lives and world into the economy of God's abundant grace. Did you know that three measures of flour, as Jesus says in the kingdom parable, "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until it was all leavened," was not three or four cups, as I have always imagined? Three measures of flour were actually between forty and sixty pounds of flour! Can you imagine trying to knead by hand this amount of bread dough? Jesus' parable paints a homey, yet extravagant picture of generosity: "a communal oven in a Galilean village where everyone has enough to eat."¹ That's one picture of what the kingdom-coming looks like.

Another picture is the "all-in" merchant in search of fine pearls. His unexpected find reprioritizes his whole life. It changes his values and his future plans. This parable suggests the magnitude of life change that happens when we stop being worry-warts and choose to be "kingdom-comers." Once he purchases the pearl of great value, he is no longer a merchant. Somehow this pearl is qualitatively

different than any other, it points him to something new—something unseen and unknown. This merchant has found new outlook and a different framework from which to live his life.

Let's be honest: aren't we always seeking finer pearls in some form: a new job, a new relationship, a new diet, a new look, or maybe a new tool, a new truck, a better fishing lure—or something, *anything* new that promises spiritual fulfillment? But then every time we obtain that thing, we are still not quite content. We want something else. That is not what the kingdom of heaven is like. When we pray "Thy kingdom come," that's not what we are praying for. Consider the merchant in Jesus' parable: For the merchant, the one pearl has stopped this cycle in him. The find of this pearl, has supplanted all his other wants and desires. Let me be clear: The kingdom of heaven is not the merchant nor the pearl: the kingdom of heaven is like this life change: the merchant is no longer what he was.ⁱⁱ

Does this parable disturb you? To challenge our desire to acquire or our sense of value is unsettling, unnerving. But that is what these parables are supposed to do. The kingdom of God parables may also throw us because the word "kingdom" throws up on our mental screens crowns and swords, perhaps Winterfell, Kingslanding, and the Lanisters, "who always pay their debts," (Game of Thrones, watchers, you know what I'm talking about). The Kingdom of God that Jesus is describing is unlike any kingdom his listeners have ever known – he throws in a reference to King Solomon in our passage, the King of Israel who amassed incredible wealth and power by economic extraction. That's the only kind of king or kingdom they would have known.

If you look at all thirty-seven times that Jesus describes the kingdom of God in the gospels, that kingdom is never like a kingdom on earth or on TV. Thirty-Seven times Jesus is reshaping the imaginations of his followers. God's kingdom may better be described as "kin-dom" rather than a kingdom where the wealthy and powerful rule over the weak, taking advantage of that weakness. As Melissa Florer-Bixler has written in Sojourner's magazine, "Ada María Isasi-Díaz was visiting her friend, a Franciscan nun name Georgene Wilson, when she heard the word for the first time: kin-dom rather than kingdom. I imagine that as she sat with this word, turning it over in her mind, something clicked about her own life. For Latinas, she would go on to write, kin-dom offered a description of liberation that was "self-determining" within an interconnected community, seeing God's movement emerge from *la familia*, from the family God makes. The liberation of God at work among people, the good news for those who suffer at the hands of kings. She wrote that, for Latinas, this liberation emerges from opening up space where love invites us into kinship, invites us to join others at a table that grows. Liberation is found not in hope deferred to another world, to life after death, but what can be created now."ⁱⁱⁱ

When we pray fervently, "Thy kingdom come" we are praying for change. Change of heart, change of systems that work against God's justice. God knows, our church, our community, our world, our earth needs change. The magnitude of hurt and hate, the chasm between the haves and the have nots keeps widening. Our earth, our one earth is crying out to us all to change our plundering of its delicate ecosystem on which we all depend. I believe in God's kin-dom where every citizen is helped, not hindered to register to vote. I believe in God's kin-dom where a child's zip code does not determine the quality of education to which that child is entitled. I believe in God's kin-dom where quality health care is a human right and not a privilege. I believe in God's kin-dom where liberty and justice for all, means all. And that means a court system not skewed by dollars or skin color.

Why am I talking about these issues here in church? The Greek word for church is "ekklesia" literally translated means "the called-out ones." To be Christ's church, to be Jesus' called-out ones means we are people who are called out of the patterns and practices of this world's broken systems and into

the economy of God's grace.^{iv} To pray, "Thy Kingdom Come," calls forth not only personal transformation, but in the same breath political and systemic healing. If we want to be Christ's church, FPC that is our call. Thy kingdom come is a prayer for healing change.

Mustard seeds, grains of yeast don't look like much. They're small and plain. And as they begin their work they are completely hidden. Not visible to the outside world. Nor can they be changed into a tree or a loaf bread without the power of God and the faithful work of cultivators, kneaders, and bakers. We also know that growing a seed into a mature plant or baking bread from scratch is messy and unpredictable. The progress is hard to measure. Nor is it very steady. We'd prefer neat, predictable, and risk-free. But that isn't the kingdom we're praying for when we pray "Thy kingdom come." That isn't the kingdom where the love of Christ rules our every move and motive. That isn't the life that this prayer will lead us into—as individuals or as a church.

This prayer pushes us to look forward. The petition is not, "*Thy kingdom come.*" No. God's kingdom is yet to come and is still waiting on us to do our part. What is distracting us? What worries are we giving our first attention? Jesus gives us our priority list right here. "Do not worry about the things that God provides for you," says Jesus—instead strive first for the Kingdom of Heaven, and then *all* these things—from crayons to salvation—shall be added unto you.

ⁱ Amy Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi*, (Harper Collins: New York, NY, 2014) 137.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, See pp. 159-164.

ⁱⁱⁱ Melissa Florrer-Bixler, "The Kin-Dom of Christ," *Sojourners Magazine*, Nov. 20, 2018, <https://sojo.net/articles/kin-dom-christ>.

^{iv} Jonathon Wilson-Hartgrove, *Reconstructing the Gospel: Finding Freedom from Slaveholder Religion*, (Intervarsity Press Books: Downers Grove, IL, 2018), 139.