

“Glimpses of the Kingdom”  
Isaiah 2:1-5/Matthew 6:9-10a

Last Sunday, we began a focused time of reflecting on the Lord’s Prayer. That beloved model for communicating with God was suggested to us by Jesus himself. He offered it as part of his Sermon on the Mount and seven days ago we focused on its opening sentence: “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” We pondered then how the first petition in that prayer, namely that God would make the divine name holy throughout creation, was something that only God ultimately could do. That reality continues as the prayer moves forward and we speak its second petition, a request of our Creator for “thy kingdom come.”

It’s a notable ask Jesus proposes and one that is unique to the New Testament. To want God’s name to be hallowed is a consistent theme in the Old Testament beginning with the third of the Ten Commandments. Yet to pray for God’s reign to break in is not found in the first part of our Bible, but only in the New Testament. Given that lack of precedence in the Jewish Scriptures and the fact that Jesus doesn’t explain in the prayer what he means in that petition, the question of what we are asking for in “thy kingdom come” is open to interpretation.

In exploring several commentaries, I heard a few consistent suggestions. Some have proposed that in those words Jesus wants us to ask God to become king of our heart and to reign in our lives. Others contend that this part of the prayer is an articulated longing for God’s justice and peace to be evident throughout creation. Others yet conclude that the second petition is one in which we are asking God to bring about the Second Coming of Christ; the arrival of that new heaven and new earth along with an end to human history. We are not told.

Given the wonderful outcome of last Sunday evening for long-suffering Eagles fans, some could be excused for concluding that with that elusive victory in hand surely the end of time must be near, too. While *most* of us would know such a conclusion is a reach, I was driving to the airport on Thursday while the victory parade was happening in the city and will tell you that the lack of traffic and no visible law enforcement on the Blue Route could have led one to think something apocalyptic was occurring and maybe it was. Still, we know that the kingdom’s arrival for which we pray is far more significant than a Super Bowl victory as whatever Jesus had in mind, those words clearly ask for some kind of divine change in the world and us.

As is true of the first petition, the primary agent for the kingdom’s arrival is once again God. “This is a proclamation that the future is God’s,” one scholar said “not a summon to people to bring in the new age.” (Tucker, Gene M. “Book of Isaiah 1-39” *The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume VI*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001, p. 68). In other words, the fulfillment of our request for “thy kingdom come” is something that can only be brought about by God.

Still, that petition does not leave us waiting in a passive way. Another believer noted that “One cannot pray this prayer without committing one’s own will and action to fulfilling the will of God in the present and praying that other people will submit themselves to God’s rule in the here and now.” (Bruner, Dale. *Matthew: The Christbook*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1987, p. 204) We will not bring in the kingdom by our efforts, but there is a human response to it even so.

We see that truth articulated in our Old Testament reading. In those words from Isaiah, the prophet uses the image of “the mountain of the LORD” as a synonym for the place God lives and then offers a vision of a future which sounds something like the Kingdom of God to me. “In the days to come,” Isaiah says, “the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.” On that day, all people will say “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the

house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” That steps marks the start to lasting peace as instruments of war are transformed into tools for providing food. “Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,” Isaiah ends, “neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!”

In those words, the primary actor is God, but human beings have a clear role to play, too. Likewise when we pray “thy kingdom come,” we seek a transformed existence. It ultimately depends on God, but we all play a part in offering glimpses of the kingdom, too.

Last month, an op-ed piece appeared with the title of “How Would Jesus Drive?” It grew out of a comment from Pope Francis in his New Year’s Eve homily when he said that the people who have the most influence on society are everyday folks who through everyday gestures become what he called “the artisans of the common good.” Small deeds, the Pontiff said, “express concretely love for the city...without giving speeches, without publicity, but with a style of practical civic education for daily life.” At one point, he focused on how that reality is to be embodied in driving, praising persons “who move in traffic with good sense and prudence.”

David Brooks expounded on that idea in his column. He spoke about different styles of driving in various regions of our country and quoted some statistics about the most accident-prone and most aggressive cities for driving. Brookes then spoke about what driving says about our community. “If you speed up so I can’t merge into your lane,” the journalist said “you’re teaching me that the society around here is basically competitive, not cooperative. If, on the other hand, you give me a friendly wave after I let you in, you’re teaching me that this is a place where a kindness is recognized and gratitude is expressed. If you feel perfectly fine doing a three-point turn in the middle of a busy street, blocking everybody else going both ways, you teach me that people here are selfish and feel entitled. But if you get over to the right and wait your turn in a crowded highway exit lane, rather than cutting in at the last moment, that teaches me that there’s a sense of fairness and equality, and that people feel embedded in the group.”

“Driving,” Brooks continues, “means making a thousand small moral decisions: whether to tailgate to push the slowpoke faster or to give space; whether to honk only as a warning or constantly as your all-purpose show of contempt for humanity. Driving puts you in a constant position of asking, Are we in a place where there is a system of self-restraint, or are we in a place where it’s dog eat dog...Are my needs more important than everybody else’s, or are we all equal...Driving puts you in a position where you are periodically having to overrule your desire for revenge. When somebody cuts you off, you want to punish the jerk and enforce all that is right and good. But that only leads to a cycle of even worse driving, so it’s better...to turn the other cheek...In short, driving puts you into social situations in which you have to construct a shared culture of civility, and go against your own primeval selfishness, and it does so while you are encased in what is potentially a 4,000-pound metal weapon. (Brooks, David, “How Would Jesus Drive?” *The New York Times*, 1/5/18, p. A27).

Ever since reading his words I have thought more about my own driving tendencies and while I would confess that my style does not fully model what he suggested, I do have no awareness. Glimpses of the Kingdom of God come not only when driving, but all kinds of everyday acts when we or others are “artisans of the common good.” Moments that give us a glimpse of what God desires for us and all creation.

In downtown Seattle a number of years ago, a man was walking down the street just a few days before Christmas. He came upon one of those Salvation Army kettles. As he approached the volunteer ringing that bell, he felt an unaccustomed spirit of generosity come over him. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out all his change and dropped every last coin into

the kettle with a smile. The man turned to leave, but then he stopped. He reached into his back pocket, pulled out his wallet and emptied every last bill into the kettle as well. Grinning, he walked away with a bounce in his step, but two blocks later, the bounce left. "What have I done?" he thought and turned around, walked back to the woman and asked for his money back. He got it and left, walking very quickly this time, head down, looking neither to the right or left.

In writing of that true event, a man named Donel McClellan said "For two blocks, that man walked in the Kingdom of God. For two blocks he was free of the burden of his possessions. For two blocks he put other people above himself. For two blocks, he was self-giving and generous. For two blocks he was blessed; but like most of us, he could not stand the uncertainty that goes with that much blessing. He wanted to continue to think that he is in control. He walked back, out of the realm of God and back into the well-worn grooves of his weary world." (Wilton, Carlos E., "Hilarious Giving," in *Speaking of Stewardship*, William G. Carter, ed, Geneva Press: Louisville, 1998, pp. 72-73)

For you to pray "thy kingdom come" might be a request that God will reign in your life as never before whether it is marked by a generosity or compassion, patience or courage that you don't currently display. It might be a hope that Christ will return soon or that the problems you see in the world get corrected or could be something else entirely for you.

Whatever you understand that petition to mean, we offer it knowing that the arrival of God's kingdom ultimately doesn't depend on us to occur, but might well not be fulfilled without us either. Thus we are invited to stay alert to glimpses of God's reign all around even while praying that others will get such glimpses through us.