

Matthew 6:10 "Your kingdom come"

Dear Friends In Our Savior, Jesus,

Every one of us was shocked Thursday morning when we heard about officers felled in the streets of Dallas, as if they were a combat zone. Shock, Anger, Sadness, Compassion. Events of this past week were distressing. Yet we are too familiar with events like these. With events like these, we feel emotions—different people maybe feel different emotions—but intense emotions.

The most disconcerting part is that these sorts of things seem to be happening more and more often. Is it a trick of the mind—that we only remember bad stuff, and not all the good stuff? Is it simply that increased information and communication technology means that we hear more negative news than we ever would have in the past? and therefore we think more bad things are happening when in fact there aren't? Or maybe it seems more bad things happening because "The good old days were better," therefore "These days are very evil"? I really don't know.

Whether this happens more or less often than in the past, the more important question, the question everyone eventually asks is, "Why?" Listen to people talk and everyone has an idea. Good discussions. Worth thinking about. But there is also this truth that there will always be hateful and/or deranged individuals. It is a sinful world we live in. Adam and Eve invited misery into this world, and misery, once invited into a house, never leaves. Sadly, it will continue.

So, in weeks like these, it is very natural to pray. We can have big long prayers, and we should. But another good prayer for such times is a very short prayer, the one sentence prayer of our sermon text: "***Thy kingdom come.***" We tire of this world. We want something better, and it's not happening here. We feel besieged. "Dear God, you have promised to deliver us. ***Thy kingdom come.*** Take us to that better place."

At first blush, a great many people think that asking God's kingdom to come is to build a better world, here and now. And many people think that is why we Christians exist: to make living conditions better. To be sure, we Christians are concerned about people's well-being. We have a food pantry. In each of the last two years, and God-willing this year too, we will have a day to go and volunteer at Feeding America. We want a better world here and now, for our children, for our neighbors. But we realize that while we can help ease the suffering of this world, this isn't the best answer. Oh, we work to make the world a better place. And we pray that it is so. But that isn't the number one focus for Christians. And the reason it isn't our number one focus is because building a better world here and now is not God's kingdom. Even if we could eradicate poverty, murder, cancer and mosquitoes. No matter how wonderful a world it might become, it will never be God's kingdom. That's not what Jesus tells us to pray for.

So, "***Thy kingdom come,***" what is it? Let's locate it. If you talk about the United States, you could look at a map of North America and say, "There it is." If you want to talk about an actual kingdom, you could look up the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and you could point it out on a map of the Middle East. You could even show a picture of the king and royal family. But the kingdom of God? What does it look like? Where is it located?

Jesus once said, "*The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you*" (Luke 17:20-21). God's kingdom is not like other kingdoms. It is not about a locality or territory in this world. Strictly

speaking, not even in this church. Then what is this kingdom we pray for?

Many of you know that there are four Gospels, four accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus. The second one, the Gospel of Mark, is the most to-the-point of the Gospels. In the Gospel of Mark, the first words out of Jesus' mouth are these: "*The kingdom of heaven is near.*" (1:15). Jesus states that God's kingdom is tantalizingly close, "*It is near.*" Like a near miss thunderstorm after three weeks of dry. It is so near you can hear it, even if you can't touch it. You can smell it even if you can't catch the raindrops in your mouth. It is near.

Jesus often talked of it, for just that reason. He knew it would be difficult for earth-bound minds to understand God's kingdom, its location, its purpose, how it comes into being. We want it to be here and now. So Jesus often talked of the kingdom of God to teach us about a kingdom that is not like the kingdoms or nations we are used to.

Now this is interesting because we are all members of a consumer society. And when we hear about something new and good we say, "Where can I buy it, how much will it cost?" You know what man-shopping is, right? I know what I want before I even grab the car keys. I drive to the store. I walk directly from the car to aisle 14 where I buy the lawn fertilizer, proceed to the check-out, to the car and home. Man-shopping. Woman-shopping – well, we will just skip that because I don't have enough time in this sermon. But you know the difference.

When Jesus says, "*The kingdom of heaven is near*" it kind of makes all of us want to do some man-shopping. If the kingdom of God is so close, and his kingdom is so wonderful, and some of the things that go on in the world we inhabit are so terrible, let's go out and get some kingdom of God, now.

The kingdom of God is not gotten by man-shopping. And it is not acquired by woman-shopping, either. It is something God brings to us. "***Thy kingdom come.***" God must bring it to us. God works in us, and we submit to his work in us. This prayer is a simple acknowledgement that we lack the ability to create or bring God's kingdom into being.

How the Kingdom Starts

Jesus knew that "The kingdom of heaven" [or "The kingdom of God"—interchangeable terms] would puzzle us. So he taught extensively about it in Matthew chapter 13. In that chapter of the Bible, Jesus teaches seven parables about the kingdom of heaven.

The best-known of those Matthew 13 parables about the kingdom of heaven is the Parable of the Sower. A certain farmer scattered seed. It fell on four types of ground, much of the seed failed to grow, for various reasons. But some seed fell on good ground and grew. Jesus said the seed is the word of God. Jesus explained that is how the kingdom of God comes into being. When we pray, "***Thy kingdom come,***" we pray for something in the here and now. But it isn't about the politics or money or food. We pray that God constructs his kingdom in the hearts of people who hear his message.

It isn't about us earning our way into God's kingdom. God must bring it to us. Jesus said elsewhere, "*I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.*" (John 3:16). We must, like a child being born, we must simply let him work, build and grow his kingdom in us.

But not just in us, in all people. What gets others into God's kingdom for eternity is that we bring God's Word to them, that God might build his kingdom in them. And *that* happens only when the world of God is shared. It happens when by God's Holy Spirit, a person who hears despairs of his or her own goodness, and hopes and trusts in Jesus as Savior. Without that, the kingdom of God does not exist. The most moral, kindest, most compassionate, sensitive, caring, helpful person in the world who does not trust in Jesus as his Savior from his sinfulness, is not a member of God's kingdom. Yes, you can be right up against the kingdom of God, rubbing shoulders with believers, living in the same house with them, acting even more loving than them, but that is not what makes the kingdom of God. The

passport of God's kingdom, the thing that signifies citizenship in it, is not a self-written letter of commendation, but one issued in the halls of heaven to all who believe in Jesus.

In broad terms, by praying "***Thy kingdom come,***" the first thing that we pray is that God's Kingdom grows in this world. We pray that those who already know Jesus may, like a tree, become better rooted in God's Word. "***Thy kingdom come***" is even more an evangelism prayer. We pray for the outreach God's kingdom into the hearts of unbelievers. It is our prayer that our church's Evangelism Committee and I as your pastor may speak God's Word to those who do not yet know it. "*Pray for us... pray that [we] may proclaim [the message of Christ] clearly, as [we] should.*" (Col. 4:4). "***Thy kingdom come***" is a prayer that each of us—not just the Evangelism Committee and the pastor—that each of us will use our personal contacts to speak the message of Jesus, because unless people hear that message, there is no way for God's kingdom to come to them.

Praying for a Future Kingdom

God's kingdom is not just about now.

Another of Jesus' kingdom parables in Matthew 13 made this clear. There is the Parable of the Weeds and the Wheat. In a certain field, there were both weeds and wheat growing. The landowner let both grow up together, until the harvest time. At that time he separated them out. He burned the weeds in a great fire, and he harvested the wheat for his storehouse. Jesus said that now in this world, the believers of God's kingdom are intermixed with unbelievers. And God leaves it that way for now. But there will come a day when the open enrollment period for the kingdom of God will end. Then, when the doors of opportunity close, God's kingdom will come to its full realization. Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead.

This is why we pray "***Thy kingdom come***" so passionately in times of tragedy. We look beyond this world, to the time when Jesus will come. We pray for that end to the shootings, the arguments, the overreactions and the fear. We pray for Jesus to end our own struggles against the sinful flesh. We know that we must live in the midst of these things until Jesus comes again. We look forward to that day, because we are pioneers. We are passing through this world to a promised land. We pray that Jesus keeps us faithful to the end. That his kingdom will come to us and that we may be delivered from this world.

A young person recently was learning about speech-writing. She told me that when people hear a speech, they forget most of the beginning, nearly everything in between, but they will remember the last thing in a speech. So if you really want people to remember something, you put it at the end.

Do you know what the closing words of the Bible are? Open your Bible to the very last page, and you will find this: in Revelation 22:20 it says, "*He who testifies to these things [, meaning Jesus,] says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.*" It seems that if God wanted us to remember nothing else as Christians, he wanted us to remember this, that Jesus will come again with his kingdom. While we go through the trials, tragedies and disasters of this world, the message God wants ringing in our ears is the message of hope. It is a hope that perseveres even through the greatest tragedies, not a request, but a call that God would do what he has promised, "***Thy kingdom come.***" Amen.