

A Sermon Series on the Lord's Prayer

Part Five: *"Thy Kingdom Come"*

Based on Luke 11:1-2

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The Third Petition: *"Teytey malkuthakh / Your Kingdom Come"*

The Lord's Prayer (New Revised Standard Version)

Luke 11:1-2 ~ *He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." ² He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed by your name. Your Kingdom come."*



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Abwoon d'bwashmaya: Our Father in heaven / Nethqadash shmakh: hallowed be your name / Teytey malkuthakh: Your Kingdom Come. This is the third petition in the Lord's Prayer and this is what we will be looking at today. *Teytey* means "come." *Malkuthakh* has been translated into English with the word "Kingdom." We get stuck on that word in 2021. We bring all kinds of baggage into that image, knowing that "dom" means "reign" so a Kingdom means a place where a King reigns. What comes to your mind when you think of a Kingdom? Many of you have been to Europe. Perhaps you have taken a train trip through parts of Germany and seen the castles up on hills with walled towns down below and have an idyllic picture of a benevolent king ruling over his serfs. There are some truly beautiful castles. Any of you seen Neuschwanstein, for example, after which the fairy princess castle at Disney World was modeled? Perhaps some of you have traveled across the pond to England and visited buildings related to the reigns of various kings and queens, perhaps even going to Buckingham Palace to see the changing of the guard. This is where Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth reigns today over the vast British Empire that even includes Canada where I was raised. Indeed, I grew up going to a school where we did not say the "Pledge of Allegiance" and sing "My Country Tis of Thee" but rather we sang "God Save the Queen." Perhaps, though, we should call Elizabeth's not a "Kingdom" but a "Queendom." Strangely, in doing so, we would be keeping much more closely to the Aramaic word because *Malkuthakh*, "based on the same root, was a name of the Great Mother in the middle East thousands of years before Jesus".¹ And as society progressed from being matriarchal to patriarchal, the images associated with language also became masculine so that today we talk about "Kingdoms" rather than "Queendoms," even though Queendoms, such as Elizabeth's, do exist. My Granddaughter Eliana would say that there is a Queendom here at our church too, since we have a castle-like turret outside and I, after all, am known to her as the "Queen."

The word "Kingdom," unfortunately, can also leave a bad feeling in our stomach and take on bad connotations when we think, for example, about Al Qaeda attempting to build a territorial kingdom based on a literal interpretation of Sharia law. For them building a kingdom involves increasing their geographical territory and subjecting people to hierarchical rule with medieval practices. In places such as Afghanistan, where our troops are now withdrawing after over 20 years of military presence, the concern is that as the Taliban kingdom expands into more and more of Afghanistan, girls may no longer be able to receive an education or even venture outside without being accompanied by a male relative.

¹ Douglas-Klotz, *Prayers of the Cosmos: Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Jesus*, p. 20.

Sometimes the word “Kingdom” has nothing to do with kingdoms from the past or present, but we think about a future Second Coming of Christ when there will be a new heaven and a new earth following the rapture. So we carry positive, neutral, and negative baggage into our contemporary understanding of the word ‘kingdom.’

We can be confused. But Jesus’ disciples also were confused about what the word ***Malkuthakh*** meant, especially since Jesus used this word a lot. The four Gospels record that Jesus referred to the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven (basically the same thing) over 110 times. In fact, the very first words out of Jesus’ mouth when he began his public ministry in Galilee were “Repent! [change your ways] The Kingdom of God is at hand!” (Mk 1:14; cf. Mt 4:17 who uses Kingdom of Heaven). Sharing the Good News about God’s Kingdom was the reason Jesus was sent to earth. Jesus told those he met that ***“I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose.”*** (Lk 4:43) Luke described Jesus as going to every village and town doing just this. Right at the beginning of the Lord’s Prayer, after telling his disciples that they are to hallow God’s name, his first instruction is to pray “your [God’s] kingdom come.” And Jesus kept hammering home that same message over and over again in multiple ways. ***Teytey malkuthakh.*** Your Kingdom Come.

Many of the disciples, like some today, were literalists. They thought that the “Kingdom” Jesus was talking about had an actual King who ruled over an actual geographical territory in a hierarchical and autocratic way, as King Herod did back then. The big difference, of course, is that the new king would not be an evil, bad king but a kind, benevolent king who would rule not by might but according to principles of mercy and justice. But this was not at all what Jesus was talking about as he tried to help them move to a metaphorical, mystical understanding of what ***Malkuthakh*** meant. When you widen your aperture and look at all of Jesus’ sayings, you realize that the Kingdom of God that Jesus refers to is a spiritual quality infusing all of reality, which is perhaps best described as the “realm” or “dominion of love.” We pray for love’s dominion to come.

To try to get through to the literalists, Jesus used parables that evoked images of the Kingdom of God, love’s dominion, being like:

- A merchant looking for fine pearls and when he found one of great value went and sold all that he had and bought it (Mt 13:45-46).
- Yeast that a woman took and mixed into three measures of flour, until all of it was leavened (Mt 13:33).

- A grain of mustard seed, which, even though the smallest of seeds, grew and became a huge shrub with large branches where the birds of the air could make nests and rest in its shade (Mt 13:31-32)

We pray that God's realm of love, which we search for above all else as a priceless jewel, would not only be present but would grow and expand through this world just as yeast does, so that all would find rest in its shade. We pray that this realm of love would expand and infuse all that is. We often are sadly disappointed and discouraged to see the difference between God's plan and our reality. Phil Thraikill recalls that:

"It was an awful time in London. In December of 1952 a toxic mix of dense fog and thick black smoke killed four thousand in four days. Coffins ran out, as did funeral flowers. It was one of the deadliest environmental disasters in English history. Here is what happened:

"As smoke pouring out of London's chimneys mixed with fog, the air turned colder. In response, chilly Londoners heaped more coal on their fires, making more smoke. It was soon so dark some said they couldn't see their own feet.

By Sunday, December 7, visibility fell to near nothing. Roads were littered with abandoned cars. Midday concerts were cancelled due to total darkness. Sunlight was filtered out by an aerial blanket of floating soot. Archivists at the British Museum found smog lurking in the book stacks. Cattle in the city's Smithfield market were killed and thrown away before they could be slaughtered and sold; their lungs were black.

Funeral director Stan Cribb has led thousands of funerals through the smoggy streets of London, and he says the 1952 event dwarfs all others he has seen. He remembers the moment he saw the first gray wisps hanging in the air: 'You had this swirling, like somebody had set a load of car tires on fire.'"

What happened to London in December of '52 [Rev. Thraikill writes] is an apt image of our world as it must appear to God. We don't see the situation accurately because it's all we've ever known; we were born into this polluted environment. This amazing creation, a once safe place with clear skies and clean air, now suffocates under a blanket of personal evil and pervasive disease, universal sin and unavoidable death; we inhabit an atmosphere of moral distortion and physical pain, intellectual rebellion and spiritual corruption from which there is no escape and in which our attempts to make things better often only make them worse.

We breathe it in; it becomes part of who we are, and we pass on the accumulated negative effects to all who come after us, including our children. This is what the church means by original sin; it is not something we can escape by trying harder or being better; it is our world.”²

If you were to take an aerial photograph of our nation it might look somewhat like London back in 1952. My husband Russ shared with me this week that the fires raging out west have drifted all the way to the East Coast so that there was a fog over Yankee stadium, making visibility difficult. We think of the ongoing unprecedented heat wave, where numerous records are being broken and hundreds already have died. And underneath the polluted skies today, which almost all scientists say must be attributed to human caused climate change, a viral pandemic continues to rage globally leading to heightened anxiety and grief. There are people who are hungry and homeless (80 children in the Paducah school system are presently homeless, for example). Wars are being waged around the world. People are fleeing from their countries and becoming refugees. Violent crime continues. We no longer even know whom we can trust and what is true anymore. This is not how God wants us to live. God wants God’s realm of love to be manifest. God wants God’s Kingdom to come. Jesus asks us to pray for it. ***Teytey malkuthakh.***

Teytey! Come! This is an active verb filled with emotion. A plea for something to be ushered in. There should be an exclamation mark at the end of this petition. Your Kingdom Come! There is a young family in our community with two preschoolers. Both parents have lost their jobs during the pandemic. Their unemployment barely covers the rent and, after they have received their allotment from Need Line, they get their food from the Blessing Boxes around town. Now their car has broken down and one of them has an abscessed tooth. They pray: Your Kingdom Come! May your realm of love reach into our situation so that our needs might be taken care of. A man’s wife of fifty years has been diagnosed with cancer. He watches her struggle and does not know how he will be able to live without her. She is so afraid. They both pray: Your Kingdom Come! A middle-aged woman who is the sole support of her family has been diagnosed with Covid-19 and, as she struggles to breathe, she prays: Your Kingdom Come! An elderly couple in Oregon who live on their social security checks without air conditioning were becoming dangerously dehydrated in 110 degree heat. They pray: Your Kingdom Come!

² Phil Thrailkill, “The Curriculum of God’s Kingdom,” in www.sermons.com

A young woman lives with constant abuse from her husband but is afraid to tell anyone. She shouts out to God: Your Kingdom Come! A middle school boy is bullied at school and called fat, ugly, stupid. He prays: Your Kingdom Come! Please help someone to be my friend! A successful businessman is losing his hold on life because of his addiction to opioids. Close to rock bottom, hands shaking and crying, he prays: Your Kingdom Come! An elderly woman sits in her wheelchair in a nursing home. No one has visited her in months. Her loneliness is turning into a dark depression. Mustering all the dignity and strength and shred of hope she has she cries out: Your Kingdom Come!

Teytey malkuthakh! Pope Francis calls this petition “The Beggar’s Prayer.” To say “Your Kingdom Come” is to be a beggar, not just for those with material needs but for those with emotional and spiritual needs too. ***“Teytey!”*** “Come!” we beg of God. And Christians have been begging for God’s realm of love to come all through our history. In fact, this is the entire story of the Bible in a nutshell. Jesus is asking us to pray for God’s realm of love to come. And, with Jesus’ ascension into heaven and our being commissioned to be Christ’s very body on earth, we are called to roll up our sleeves and “Come”! We are called to respond to the cries of people to “Come!” “Help Us!” That’s what it means to be a Christian or “little Christ.”

I think back to the difficult situation of London in December of 1952 and the horrible conditions that continued to linger for decades. So many families during that time must have cried out to God “Your Kingdom Come!” And many Christians rolled up their sleeves and got to work answering that call. One of my all-time favorite shows is “Call the Midwife,” a BBC period drama also showing on Netflix that is based on the memoirs of Jennifer Worth, who worked with the Anglican convent, the “Community of St. John the Divine.” It tells the story of a group of nurse midwives who worked in the impoverished Poplar neighborhood in the East End of London in the late 1950s and 1960s as they responded to the pleas of those in their neighborhoods needing God’s realm of love to extend to them. Each episode focuses on a different social, cultural, economic issue, or spiritual issue including things like healthcare, teen pregnancy, adoption, abortion, miscarriage, birth defects, poverty, homelessness, job loss, divorce, domestic violence, sexual abuse, epidemic disease, prostitution, incest, religion and faith, racism and prejudice, same-sex attraction and so much more. Day by day, encounter by encounter, the nurse midwives respond to the prayer “Your Kingdom Come!” as they bring God’s realm of love to those they cared for.

This week I wondered, if a period piece were later to be done about our own church, what episodes might be shown? Would there be episodes that might highlight ways in which we had helped usher in God's Kingdom in our own little corner of the world? With that question in mind, I did a little tour of our church building and, in spite of the challenges the pandemic brought to our congregation, I was encouraged by what I saw. In the elder's room I saw many baby bottles filled with coins, bills, and checks to go to Life House so that when a young woman finds herself with an unexpected pregnancy and cries out "Your Kingdom Come!" she will find support. Beside them were little cardboard offering boxes the youth had put together with "Laundry Love" written on them. The quarters in them are to go to help families do laundry as they cry out "Your realm of love extend to us" so that they might go to work and send their children to school with dignity in clean clothes. Beside them were some beautifully made pillowcases sewn with love by Terri Gould to be sold at an upcoming Bazaar. We know that the funds raised through the Noel Market crafts made by Vicky Holton, Betty McCord, Charlotte Van Dyke, Celeste McAllister, Krista Crass and others, and baked items made by so many in our congregation go to help countless individuals in various situations who struggle with the many challenges life has presented them with as they cry out "God, may your Kingdom of love come and help me in my need!"

As I go into the office, I find an envelope with some cash that has been given to our Benevolence Fund with the request that it be distributed no questions asked to someone who needs food, or gas, or an electric or utility bill paid. Every person who calls the church or comes to our door is crying out "Your Kingdom Come!" "Help me in my need!" There also is a check written out to "HOPE Calloway" from our congregation to help support Crystal Dillard's efforts over the weekend as she is a Box Dweller raising funds to help those facing housing insecurity or homelessness in our community. Downstairs in the fellowship hall there are still a few electric candles purchased by Rebecca Landolt to be sold as a fundraiser, along with others recently purchased, for HOPE Calloway as we are instructed to light a candle in our windows to bring awareness to the problem of homelessness in our community. Some of the "Little Acts of Kindness" bags made by Celeste McAllister also are there, to be filled with helpful items and given those in need we might meet as a gesture of love and clear response to those who cry out "Your Kingdom Come!"

I climb the stairs to the second floor of our Christian Education Building and open the door that has "Clutch" written on it. I find boxes filled with personal hygiene items to be brought for girls to use in our two middle and two high schools and homeless shelters,

knowing they will be grateful that God’s realm of love is being extended to them in this highly practical way. I proceed to the children’s Sunday School room and see canned goods on one of the shelves, waiting to be carried to the Blessing Box behind our church by our children as weekly they help fill the stomachs of the many food-insecure families in our community who may lose sleep at night worrying about their next meal as they cry out “Your Kingdom Come!” I recall how tables full of non-perishable items in the fellowship hall have been taken by the youth, under the leadership of Elena Roberts, to many of the blessing boxes around town.

I go back downstairs and walk through the breezeway past the table that has resources on it for people struggling with mental health issues, or who might be grieving the death of a loved one. They are there so that when anguished people’s souls cry out in silence “Your Kingdom of Love!” we might be able to point them to resources and support groups who would help them. Up the little staircase into the hallway behind the sanctuary are the green Need Line bags waiting to be filled with food and personal hygiene items as people’s bodies cry out “Your Kingdom Come!” I walk into our beautiful sanctuary, where together on Sundays we join our voices together to pray “Your Kingdom Come!” At the back is the bin that recently has been emptied of individually-wrapped snacks that have been delivered to Main Line Youth Center. The bin now is being filled with school supplies for the children in our two school systems as they and their families cry out “Your Kingdom Come!”

I then go down the stairs leading into the “dungeon” beneath the sanctuary and am amazed as I walk into the room that David Robinson has turned into an Outreach Center that is filled with food, and school supplies and items for the Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes. David’s whole life is one of service to those who need God’s realm of love to be extended to them! I exit out the door leading out to the parking lot. I look over and see the Blessing Box that Dan McKeel built, which so many in our congregation faithfully fill.

Our community is crying out “May your realm of love meet our needs!” The whole planet is crying out “Your Kingdom Come”! And let ours continue to be the hands, heart, and voice that help usher in God’s Kingdom of love, as we lift our voices together in unison, of one accord, and with great intention praying:

Abwoon d’bwashmaya: Our Father in heaven. Nethqadash shmakh: hallowed be your name. Teytey malkuthakh: Your Kingdom Come. Amen.