

Title: "An Invitation to Pray"

Text: Luke 11:1-4

Turn with me today to the Gospel of Luke, 11:1-4.

-We are focusing this summer on "Invitations from God."

-And here in Luke 11, we come in on a moment, when Jesus' disciples see Jesus praying,
-and they ask Jesus to teach them to pray like he does.

So Jesus invites them to pray quite simply, but also specifically and with a certain priority in mind.

So let's listen to what Jesus says, and invite him to teach us to pray, too.

Here we have Luke's very brief version of the Lord's Prayer.

-Matthew's version is much fuller and more fluid.

-But Luke's is bare bones and bullet points:

- Father, hallowed by your name
- your kingdom come
- give us each day our daily bread
- forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us
- and lead us not into temptation. Done.

But what Luke's bare bones bullet points highlight for us,

-is that the very first thing Jesus prays for, is the coming of God's Kingdom.

I mean, Jesus begins the prayer addressing God as Father, and invites us to do the same, and that's amazing!

And then He praises God's name, and honors his Father before he makes any request at all,
-and he invites us to do the same, and that's important.

But then, the first request he makes of the Father,

-and invites us to join him in requesting is:

"Your Kingdom come."

My friends, I must confess that this is not usually the first request that springs forth from my lips when I go to the Lord in prayer.

-How about you?

But it is for Jesus.

-And in fact, the coming of God's Kingdom is Jesus' first priority in everything He says and does.

All the Gospel writers tell us that everywhere Jesus went, he preached: "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent and believe the good news."

And do you remember in the Sermon on the Mount what Jesus said we were to seek first above all else? "Seek first the Kingdom of God," he said, "and His righteousness and everything else will be added unto you."

And what about all those parables that Jesus was fond of telling?

Do you remember what those little stories were all describing? -They were parables of the Kingdom.

Jesus began them by saying, "To what shall I compare the Kingdom of God..."

-It is like a pearl of great price.

-It is like a treasure hidden in a field.

-It's like a mustard seed.

-It is like a field with wheat and weeds.

-It is like a landowner whose looking for hired hands to work in his fields.

-It is like a wedding banquet.

And when he sent his disciples out to preach in his name,

-you know what he told them to do?

-Preach the good news of the Kingdom wherever you go, for to you has been entrusted the secrets of the Kingdom.

And even after Jesus was raised from the dead, Luke tells us at the beginning of the book of Acts,

-that Jesus, after his suffering, "appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God."

So, it ought not to be surprising that when Jesus taught his disciples to pray,

-the very first petition in his prayer is:

"Thy Kingdom come!"

And what is Jesus praying when he prays this prayer?
-Well, the Kingdom of God is quite simply the reign and rule of God.
-Where God reigns and rules as King, there is the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is not simply another word for heaven.
-And it is not some geographical location on earth.

The Kingdom of God exists wherever and whenever God reigns and rules as King.
-So if God reigns and rules as King in this community of believers gathered for worship this morning,
 -then the Kingdom of God is right here now.
-And if God reigns and rules as King in your life, then
 wherever you go after worship today, the Kingdom of God goes with you.
-And if God reigns and rules as King in your home and family,
 -then your home is an outpost of the Kingdom of God in your neighborhood.

And so when Jesus prays for God's Kingdom to come,
-he is praying for God to take up his rightful rule and reign as King in more and more people,
 -in more and more families,
 -in more and more neighborhoods, and towns, and cities
 -in more and more churches.

Jesus is praying that God's will might be done here on earth as it is in heaven.
-And you see, in heaven, God reigns and rules as King without dispute.
 -His will is done there joyfully, and freely, and faithfully.

Here on earth it is not quite like that, is it?
-Even among us who proclaim God as our Lord and King!
 -We do not always do God's will, or walk in God's ways.
 -We do not always act as though God reigns and rules over our lives.
-And even when we do his will, we do not always do it joyfully, or freely, or faithfully.

-Sometimes we do his will begrudgingly, dutifully, and reluctantly.

So Jesus prays, and invites us to pray: "Lord, may your Kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

"Lord, make your reign and your rule more and more evident in our lives, in our homes, in our churches, in our relationships."

And you know what?

-I have found that when I begin praying with this primary petition of Jesus in mind, it transforms the way I pray.

-It makes my praying much more God-centered, and much less self-centered.

For instance, even if I am praying for someone who is sick, or recovering from an operation.

-If I am simply praying for them to get well, then my goal in the prayer is that they feel better, and have an easier, more pain free experience of life.

-But if I am praying for God's Kingdom to come, then I end up praying that even in the person's suffering,

-he or she might experience the presence of the King,

-and might grow in faith, and in hope, and in compassion and have a story to tell of God's reign and rule.

-And if the person ends up getting healed,

-then they might see the healing as another expression of God's reign and rule in their life,

-and have another testimony to tell of how God's Kingdom was made real in their life experience.

You see how this one petition in the Lord's prayer can govern and guide the way we pray all of our other petitions?

For instance, we might pray:

"Lord, let your Kingdom come in the midst of this polarized, political morass the world and our country are in the midst of.

-Wean us off of our idols, Lord. Show us the Kingdom values that really matter.

-Teach us to trust in you more than in our political leaders.

- Give us stories to tell of your reign and rule so that we offer the world around us a whole different way of life.
- Let us live out the values of your Kingdom right in the midst of this polarized world.

You see, this is all a part of inviting God's kingdom to come in our lives, in our families, in our churches, in our nations.

And we need to remember as we pray this, that Jesus said, "The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed.

"It is one of the smallest of seeds, but when planted in the garden it grows to become a tree and the birds of the air can perch in its branches."

So we remember that the growth of God's kingdom does not come in big and bold and sudden ways.

- Even for Jesus, it started small, with just himself.
- And then a few guys, and a few women
- and then a few more and the movement grew.
- Slowly, organically, multiplying followers.

And then after His death and resurrection he sends his little mustard seed band of disciples into the world to do the same,

- starting with Jerusalem where they were,
- and then Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

- Who at the time would ever have believed that this mustard seed Kingdom would turn the world upside down?
- But that's the way the Kingdom of God works.
- It starts small, and multiplies.
- Jesus says its like yeast in a loaf of bread.
- Hardly detectable at first, but then it leavens the whole loaf.

Well, when we pray this prayer, "Your Kingdom come,"

- we are praying for Jesus to continue this work of Kingdom extension in our day, in our lives, in our world.

A few weeks ago I was in Pittsburgh for the Annual Gathering of our 4C churches.

- And I want to tell you that it is truly amazing what God is doing all over the USA, in spite of the political turmoil.

I want to show you a short video of one of our new church plants going on in New Bedford, MA,
-which has grown out of a few people praying that prayer:
“Thy Kingdom come.”

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It's all a part of the same mustard seed movement to extend the reign and rule of God into the lives of more and more people, and more and more communities of people.

As we often say around here, it's all about learning to
-love God with all our heart,
-love others as Jesus has loved us
-and as we go in the world, make disciples of others who will do the same.

It's not complicated...but life is complicated.
-And there is opposition out there to this mustard seed movement.
-There is opposition in the spiritual realm.
-And there is opposition in the worldly realm.
-And there is opposition right within our own hearts and minds from our old sinful selves.

And so we need to keep on praying this simple prayer for God's Kingdom to come.
-We need to pray it for our own lives.
-We need to let it remind us of the simple priority of seeking first God's Kingdom and His righteousness ourselves.
-We need to pray it for each other,
-asking that God's Kingdom might be experienced in both
-the great situations we find ourselves in,
-and the lousy situations we find ourselves in.
-We need to pray it for our missionaries who are extending the Kingdom of God in lands far away,
-and for our own missionary work in extending God's Kingdom right here in our metro-Boston area.

Jesus invites us to pray for God's Kingdom to come.
-Pray for God's reign and God's rule to grow and multiply in your own life, your own family, your own neighborhood, your own church, and into the world.

Let's pray.