

Title: "Thy Kingdom Come: Hope!"
Text: Matthew 6:5-13, Isaiah 2:1-5

This Fall we have been "re-introducing Jesus."

- That is, we have been inviting the writers of the New Testament to re-introduce us to the Jesus that they had come to know and love.
- And we have been seeking to discover again for ourselves who this Jesus is so that we might come to know and love him,
- and then go forth into our world to make Him known.

Well, today we enter into Advent,

- and this year during Advent I'd like us to be "re-introduced"
- to what Jesus meant when he taught his disciples to pray, "Thy Kingdom come."

It is the first petition in what we call "The Lord's Prayer."

"Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

When Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them how to pray,

- that is the first thing Jesus asked them to pray for every time they prayed.

And my friends, it is an Advent prayer.

- The word Advent means "coming."
- And the central hope of Advent is for the coming of the Lord, and the coming of God's Kingdom,
- so that God's will might indeed be done here on earth as it is in heaven.

Turn with me to the Gospel of Matthew, 6:5-13, listen as I read to you that place in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus teaches his disciples to pray this prayer.

Each Sunday in Advent we light the successive candles on the Advent Wreath,

- and today's candle was the candle of HOPE.
- It will be followed in weeks to come by the candles of Peace, and then of Joy, and then of Love.

I want to use those weekly themes to “light our way” as we re-introduce what Jesus meant when teaching his disciples to pray for the coming of God’s Kingdom.

Today, it is the theme of Hope.

-The prayer “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as in heaven,” is the central hope of the Christian Faith.

As Christians we long to see God’s reign and God’s rule restored on this earth.

-We long to see the powers of darkness and death defeated.

-We long to see the effects of sin and hell overcome.

-We long to see Jesus ruling as Lord of all,
-and people from every nation, tribe, and tongue worshipping around his throne.

The hope of Advent is for the fulfillment of God’s whole plan of salvation.

-This is what Jesus asked us to pray for every day when praying “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

But in our day, we need to recognize that the very language of this prayer can actually get in the way of our understanding what we are praying for when we pray it.

-The word “Kingdom” does not denote a reality that we are immediately familiar with,
-and the associations we have with the word are not primarily good ones.

What I mean is, that Kings and Kingdoms pretty much went out of fashion at the end of the 1800’s.

-The Kings and kingdoms that are left
-either have kings and queens who are largely ceremonial like in England,
-or have kings and princes who are despotic and get away with murder like in Saudi Arabia.

In the United States, we kind of look down on kings and kingdoms as relics of the past.

-The word “kingdom” smacks to us of imperialism, dominion, patriarchy, tyranny, and oppression.

So when it comes to speaking of “the Kingdom of God,” modern Americans might well have associations with those words that are the opposite of what Jesus intended when he spoke of the Kingdom of God and taught his disciples to pray for the coming of God’s Kingdom.

Jesus saw the coming of God’s Kingdom as being
-good news for the poor, bringing release to the captives, recovery of sight for the blind, and a setting free of those in bondage.
-That’s the opposite of imperialism, dominion, patriarchy, tyranny, and oppression.

And when Jesus came proclaiming the coming of GOD’s Kingdom,
-those words were charged with a cultural and political electricity for his fellow Jews in Palestine.
-They heard him proclaiming that the imperialistic, dominating, tyrannical oppression of the Roman Empire was about to be overthrown!

There was a cultural relevance and a revolutionary charge to those words that is lost on us.

In our day, when we speak of “the Kingdom of God,” people think we are talking about heaven,
-and most people think that if there even is such a place, it has very little cultural relevance for our world today.

The Kingdom of God? People in our day may hope to go there when they die, but it doesn’t have much to do with the way they live their lives here and now at all.

So as we are “re-introducing Jesus,” we need to be mindful of the language barriers we must overcome in presenting Jesus and his message to the world in which we live.

And perhaps by understanding better ourselves what Jesus meant by those words,
-we can find appropriate ways to pray this prayer ourselves and translate His message of hope to the people around us.

So in our day, Eugene Peterson in his translation of the New Testament, translated the Lord's Prayer like this:

"Our Father in heaven, reveal who you are.

Set the world right; do what's best – as above, so below."

You see, instead of "Thy Kingdom come," he translated it as "Set the world right."

Another modern translator translated that petition as: Father in heaven, may all your dreams for this world come true."

You see, this language gets to the heart of the hope Jesus proclaimed,

-and it gives us a way to talk about brokenness and evil and sin of the world which needs to be set right.

By praying, "Lord, set the world right," we are acknowledging that the world is not right as it is now.

By praying that all God's dreams for the world come true,

-we are acknowledging that the world as it is now, is more of a nightmare that needs to be woken up from.

We can share with people around us that in God's original dream for creation,

-he wasn't dreaming of wars and slaughter, kidnappings and child abuse, racism and injustice, greed and exploitation, pollution and strip mining.

No, his vision for creation as described all through the Bible is wrapped up in Hebrew words like: Shalom, Mishpat, Tsedekah, Hesed, Emet.

-These are words which mean: peace and wholeness, justice, loving-kindness, faithfulness, mercy, and love.

-The world was created to be a place where we would live in a loving relationship with God, with each other, and with the created order around us.

And when Jesus was born into this world broken by the Fall into sin, He came to restore and redeem that creation.

-He came to re-establish that kind of Kingdom.

-He came to set the captives free, and mend the broken, and release the prisoners, and restore our souls.

He came to inaugurate God's Kingdom again on earth.
-And He begin a process of redemption by which God's great dream for this world would once again come true.

This is the hope of Advent: Come, Lord, Jesus, bring that dream to fulfillment.

So how do we translate that hope and that dream to the world around us.

Well, 50 years ago, Martin Luther King, Jr, did it for our whole country in a pretty powerful way,
-at a very difficult time in our nation's life.
-The Vietnam War was raging, and racial tensions were exploding into violence in our cities.

The brokenness of the world was apparent everywhere.
Dr. King stood in our nation's capital in front of the Lincoln Memorial and used that very language of "I have a dream"
-to paint a picture of God's preferred future for our country.

And it wasn't a Republican vision or a Democrat vision.
-It wasn't a Libertarian vision or a Marxist vision.
-Amazingly enough, it was an unabashedly biblical vision.
-It was a black Baptist pastor inviting our nation to join in praying for God's Kingdom to come and God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

But he said it like this:

"We have come to this hallowed spot, to remind America of the fierce urgency of Now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. And some of you have come from areas where your quest -- quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to

work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive. Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed.

Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends.

And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a *dream* today!

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of "interposition" and "nullification" -- one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a *dream* today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; "and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together."²

This is our hope, and this is the faith that I go back to the South with.

With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

And this will be the day -- this will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning:

My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing.

Land where my fathers died, land of the Pilgrim's pride,

From every mountainside, let freedom ring!

And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.

And so let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire.

Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.

Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.

Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado.

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California.

But not only that:

Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia.

Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.

Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi.

From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when this happens, and when we allow freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when *all* of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual:

Free at last! Free at last!

*Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!*³

My friends, Dr. King proclaimed a vision of what it would be like if God's dream for our country and for this world would come true.

He wasn't telling people what to do.

-He was giving them a vision of what could be.

-He was describing the hope of the preferred future.

-And it was a biblical, godly hope.

-An Advent hope.

-A hope for what it would be like if God's Kingdom would come and God's will would be done on earth as in heaven.

I have copies of the full speech available in my office for anyone interested, or could email it to you if you want.

-I urge you to read it yourself and pray it for the nation we live in now 60 years later.

-Much of what Dr. King envisioned has come to be.

-But much of what he envisioned seems still a long way off.

This is the way it is in this broken world.

-But we Christians are called in every generation to pray for God to set the world right.

-And we are invited to join Jesus in living out that life of God's Kingdom now by the power of His Spirit.

We are to be an Advent people,

-People who pray every day, "Lord, may your Kingdom come and your will be done on this earth as it is in heaven."

-Or as Eugene Peterson put it, "Father, set the world right. As above, so below.

Let us pray.