

1 Chronicles 29:10-13
1 Thessalonians 2:9-12

15th Sunday After Pentecost
Midway Presbyterian Church
September 13, 2020

Thine Is the Kingdom

The Introduction to the Old Testament Lesson

In our Old Testament Lesson today from 1 Chronicles 29, we first read of King David's great gifts to build a temple for the glory of God. Next we read of the gifts of other Israelites. Then David blesses the Lord before all the assembly. Listen to these words from 1 Chronicles 29:10-13, which sound very much like the concluding words of the Lord's Prayer...

The Introduction to the Epistle Lesson

In our Epistle Lesson today the church at Thessalonica is reminded of the ministry of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. The people are challenged to lead a life worthy of the God who had called them into his kingdom and glory—words that echo the closing phrase of the Lord's Prayer. Fitting words for the church then, and now. Listen to 1 Thessalonians 2:9-12...

Sermon

The Lord's Prayer is a prayer for a community of disciples and so we ask for *our* daily bread and the forgiveness of *our* sins and protection and deliverance from tests, trials, and temptations for *all of us*.

The concluding words of praise, "*For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever,*" are not part of the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples. They're not found in the prayer recorded in the Gospel of Luke (11:1-4) or in the oldest manuscripts of the Gospel of Matthew (6:8-13). The ending of the Lord's Prayer that is so familiar to us is an addition by the early church. And it is similar to the prayer of David recorded in our Old Testament Lesson from 1 Chronicles. Why did the early church add these final words of praise? According to Luke's

Gospel, when he taught his disciples this prayer, Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem and the cross. Appropriately, Jesus ended his prayer on a somber note concerning the time of trial and rescue from the evil one (Luke 11:4). But the early church experienced not just the cross but also the resurrection, and then the spread of the good news about Jesus even under persecution and martyrdom and so felt compelled to add a note of triumph.

Though these closing words of the Lord's Prayer may not have been the words of Jesus himself, they certainly are not contradicted by anything he said or did. Mozart, in the final months of his life and illness, was commissioned to write a requiem Mass for a citizen of Vienna. Feverishly he composed the opening sections. But his coughing spasms grew worse. He wrote the beautiful "Lachrymose" passage. And then he died and was buried in a pauper's grave. But his students could not bear that the haunting *Requiem* would remain unfinished and unsung. So they studied his notes. They remembered his techniques. They completed the Mass. And today, whenever it is performed, its lyric beauty pays homage to its famous author, its original composer, not to the students who completed it. So it is with the final phrase of the Lord's Prayer.

It's interesting that the closing of the Lord's Prayer parallels the beginning. Early on we pray, "*thy kingdom come.*" And we affirm at the end, "*Thine is the kingdom.*" We pray, "*thy will be done,*" and we affirm God has the power to accomplish God's will, "*Thine is the power.*" We pray, "*Hallowed be Thy Name,*" and we affirm, "*Thine is the glory.*" When we pray for God's kingdom to come and declare that God reigns over all, we're recognizing that we're not self-sufficient, and there's more to life than we sometimes recognize.

A while back I read of a newspaper story about a car accident, in which a screaming woman was trapped in a car dangling from a freeway transition road in East Los Angeles. The

19-year-old woman apparently fell asleep behind the wheel shortly after midnight. The car, which had plunged through a guardrail, was left dangling by its left rear wheel. A half dozen passing motorists stopped, grabbed some rope from one of their vehicles, tied the rope to the back of the woman's car, and hung on until fire units arrived. A ladder was positioned to help stabilize the car while firefighters tied the vehicle to tow trucks with cables and chains. "Every time we would move the car she'd scream," said one of the rescuers. She was in such pain. It took almost 2 ½ hours for the passers-by, the California Highway Patrol officers, tow truck drivers, and firefighters – about 25 people in all – to secure the car and pull the woman to safety. "It was kind of funny," the Los Angeles Fire Marshall said later. "She kept saying, 'I'll do it myself.'"

That's an extreme example but I think it makes the point: there are times when self-sufficiency goes too far. There are times in our lives when we face situations that are overwhelming. How often, like the woman in the car dangling by one wheel, do we try to "do it all by ourselves," rather than turning to God and recognizing there are times when we all need some help? We all need the help of other people and the help of God. We were not made to run the world or to sustain it. That's why we say "Thine is the kingdom" and not "mine is the kingdom" or "ours is the kingdom."

John Killinger tells the story of E. Stanley Jones, the great Methodist missionary to India, who was a friend of Mahatma Gandhi. Visiting Russia for the first time, Jones was depressed by what he saw and heard. Russia, he thought, was a great prison of the spirit, and he felt a need for reassurance. In his quiet time in Moscow, he was reading the Bible, and a verse leapt out of the book of Hebrews and spoke to him: "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that

cannot be shaken.” (Heb. 12:28) A kingdom that cannot be shaken—not only *will not*, but *cannot* be shaken. “I saw as in a flash,” he said, and I’m quoting:

that all man-made kingdoms are shakable. The kingdom of communism is shakable: they have to hold it together by purges, by force; they cannot relax that force or it will fall apart. The kingdom of capitalism is shakable. The daily fluctuation of the stock market, on account of the course of events, shows that the kingdom of capitalism is shakable. The kingdom of self is shakable. Center yourself on yourself as the center of your kingdom and the self will sour and go to pieces. The kingdom of health is shakable. The radio and TV blare constantly with supposed health remedies to hold this physical life together, but in the end the grim reaper death gets us all. Everything is shakable, except one—the Kingdom of God, the one and only unshakable Kingdom. (*Song of Ascents*, pp. 149-150)

This is why the early church testified: “Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory *for ever*—in limitless, measureless time, beyond all the boundaries of human imagination.

Now we know that for the early Christians life was not easy. They lived under the threat of Roman persecution, and even death. Some were imprisoned. Some were crucified. Some were thrown into the arena of lions.

So what this means is that we can pray the Lord’s Prayer regardless of what we face in life. The loss of a loved one. The loss of a job. The diagnosis of a terrible disease. A viral pandemic.

“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.”

There’s a true story about a young businessman in Seattle named Bill McElvaney. He limped a bit, from a war injury. Bill was a prisoner of war in Vietnam, where he had been confined for more than three years. There was torture and deprivation, during which two things had kept him going: his faith and his family. He had two little girls, one of whom he had never seen, and he thought about them and dreamed about them—about what it would be like if he ever got home, and could lie in bed with his wife in the morning as the girls came into the room and tumbled over them.

Most of the time he was kept alone in a small bamboo cell that was unbearably hot and humid in the summer and freezing in the winter. At first he was interrogated almost constantly, but then he was treated with long periods of neglect, when the only person he saw was the guard who set a bowl of soup or rice under the door of the cell. When he was questioned, he was beaten mercilessly for not providing the information his questioners wanted. “If I had known what they wanted to know,” he said, “I’m sure I would have told them; but I didn’t know.” Yet the most difficult were the periods of neglect, when his only company was the lice and spiders.

“I’ll tell you how I stayed sane,” said Bill. “I repeated all the poetry I ever knew—all the little bits and pieces we had to memorize in school—and the Lord’s Prayer. I must have said it a million times. I wished I had learned more poems. When I was a boy, I hated Longfellow and Wordsworth, but out there, they became my friends, my saviors. It was the Lord’s Prayer, though, that really got me through. I said it backwards and forwards. I said it from the middle to the end and back again. I remember saying it when they were beating me, and I said it at night when I thought I would freeze to death before morning.”

“Now when I say it in church,” Bill McElvaney said, “it reminds me of that awful time I have tried to dismiss from my memory, and I realize how important his kingdom is.”

My friends, the early church was the church of the resurrection. Something truly remarkable had happened. And they recognized how important was the unshakable kingdom of God. So it was quite natural for them to add a closing that sounds very much like the “Hallelujah Chorus” of Handel’s *Messiah*:

And he shall reign forever and ever...
King of kings and Lord of lords...
Hallelujah, Hallelujah...

“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.”

And finally, “Amen.” Martin Luther said that it was good to say “Amen.” That is, to learn not to doubt when we pray but to believe, because “Amen” means, “So be it!” The Lord’s Prayer is not an undertaking left to chance; and so we end it with conviction: “Yes, so be it.”
Amen! And Amen!