

The Lord's Prayer: Thy Kingdom Come
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Our first reading comes from our Hebrew ancestors and is used today as a prayer of mourning by our Jewish brothers and sisters. The word Kaddish means sanctification, and the prayer is a sanctification of God's name. Today the Kaddish is only said with a prayer quorum of ten men, after a psalm or prayer that has been said in their presence, since the essence of the Kaddish is public sanctification. It is with solemnity and respect then, that we speak and hear it today.

Kaddish

Magnified and sanctified be the great name of God
in the world which he created according to his will.
May he establish his Kingdom in your life and in your days,
and in the lifetime of all his people:
quickly and speedily may it come; and let us say Amen!

Matthew 6:9-13 NIV

⁹“This, then, is how you should pray:

‘Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.’

“Thy kingdom come.” The very hardest part of this phrase for me is word one: thy. I want things to work the way I want them to work, to go the way I think they should, after all, I reason, my aim is good, I am trying to follow what God would want so, in general, my plans should be good with God. Well, even if that were true, if everything I did could be directly in line with God's plans, I'm still not open to “thy kingdom come,” more like “thy kingdom come as long as it looks like my kingdom.” I must be reminded “thy, thy, thy” not “my, my, my.”

Although the origin of The Beatles' song *Let It Be* was not religious at all – Paul McCartney began writing it from a dream in which his deceased mother, Mary, appeared and spoke those three words¹ – the song has taken on a life of its own. The lyric “And when the broken-hearted people / Living in the world agree / There will be an answer / Let it be. For though they may be parted there is / Still a chance that they will see / There will be an answer / Let it be.” has been seen as another way of

¹ <http://mattandjojang.wordpress.com/2009/05/03/the-story-behind-paul-mccartneys-song-let-it-be/>

describing the arrival of the reign of God, when all will live peaceably with one another. Similar words are associated with the powerful twelve-step program: Let go and let God.

“Thy kingdom” coming in our lives doesn’t just happen. We have to let it; letting is an active process. It doesn’t mean God’s plans can’t happen unless we let them – God’s reign will become complete even if it is despite us – but we facilitate God’s reign when we don’t impede it. And we impede it when we insist on “my, my, my” instead of “thy, thy, thy.” It takes both humility and trust to pray this word, “thy.” To be humble in this prayer is to admit that my ways are small and selfish compared to God’s ways; even if I have the best of intentions, God’s view of creation far surpasses mine and so God’s cares for creation far surpass mine. If we can be so humble, our other challenge is to be trusting.

How much of our lives are spent planning and engineering particular outcomes – simply put, how much of our lives do we think we control in some manner or another? Savings gets spent in ways we didn’t intend, children make mistakes for which we thought we prepared them to avoid, we don’t live as long as our parents before us, we don’t get the job for which we believe we are perfectly suited. Admittedly, there are things we can do to improve our lives and the lives of those around us – we can eat healthfully and exercise, we can secure good educations for our children, we can save for retirement, we can drive defensively. But that doesn’t mean we can control our lives, or others, in any great measure. And yet, we spend our waking hours devising ways to control what little we can and seeking ways to make inroads in controlling what is out of our control.

For me that includes college planning, thinking about transportation to and from and how often, making lists of what to send with him (yes, I know we still have another year), devising financial strategies, which really looks more like imagining all the potential, real or imagined, challenges and schedules and resources. In my saner moments, in my more trusting moments, I remember that it will all work out, every last detail, and I take a deep breath. To pray “thy kingdom come” means doing this “remembering” in every area, taking a deep breath with every “what if,” with every start of a plan, with every step of a plan, with every completion of a plan. “**Thy** kingdom come.”

When things are going poorly in our lives, when we hit rock bottom of one sort or another, we tend to give in to God’s plans. As soon as things go well or even begin to look up, we go right back to making our plans; we like to think we take the reins again. But Jesus says, “Pray then like this... [every day, when things are going well and when things are not going well] ...thy kingdom come.” I introduced our first reading as a prayer that is spoken as a formal mourning process of our Jewish

brothers and sisters. It wasn't always this way – this tradition is first noted in the thirteenth century.² From the Jewish Virtual Library we learn that one explanation for its use in this way is “that it is an expression of acceptance of Divine judgment and righteousness at a time when a person may easily become bitter and reject God.”³ As I said though, this prayer was not originally a prayer only for mourning.

Dating back to the time of the Second Temple, the time in which Jesus lived, this prayer was said “by the rabbis when they finished giving sermons on Sabbath afternoons.”⁴ “May he establish his Kingdom in your life and in your days, and in the lifetime of all his people: quickly and speedily may it come; and let us say Amen!” Aha! After a teaching in the temple, what powerful words these would be from the one who was establishing the Kingdom. And what does this established kingdom look like? For one, as Frederick Buechner has written, “God’s kingdom is not a place, it’s a condition, a way of life.”⁵ When we understand the kingdom, the reign, in this way, it makes it a little easier to understand how it can possibly “have come” but not be complete. In each of us the reign has come but it is certainly not complete. Jesus is the only one in whom the reign has come and been completed, in whom the way of life was demonstrated in all things at all times. In each of us, we can rejoice that it has begun. Our presence in this place is a sure sign that it has begun. It has begun but we still need to pray, each day, “thy kingdom come” for it is not complete within us, which means it cannot be complete in the world.

Author William J. Carl III writes, “‘Thy kingdom come’ means we approach each new day with an element of humility, knowing that God often surprises us with liberations that always go beyond our little human schemes or plans. ‘Thy kingdom come’ means God is bringing justice, peace, reconciliation, and hope in ways that often transcend our abilities to comprehend it.”⁶ It’s in this way, in this indescribable, incomprehensible way that, by letting God’s reign grow within us, we nurture its growth in others. We see it in the tangible phenomenon known as “pay it forward,” when someone does a kindness for a stranger as a response to another stranger doing a kindness toward them. This is indeed the God’s reign being nurtured between people. And it’s also nurtured in ways which don’t have names or slogans. It’s nurtured when I tell you I am afraid or worried or sad and you ask if you might pray for me. It’s nurtured when a stranger sneezes and you say “God bless you,” which stirs within her a fondness of the faith tradition in which she was raised but has since left behind. It’s nurtured when you

² <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Judaism/kaddish.html>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ William J. Carl, III. *The Lord’s Prayer for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press; 2006) p. 26.

⁶ William J. Carl, III. *The Lord’s Prayer for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press; 2006) p. 28.

quietly donate your tax refund to a homeless ministry. I know you can think of so many more ways by which we live our prayer “Thy kingdom come,” so many ways by which you’ve seen God move only after God has been there.

Jesus in his teaching, in his ministry, in his living, dying, and rising from death, has ushered in God’s reign – it is here but it is not yet complete. We can nurture it in others, but that only comes naturally when we have been nurturing it within ourselves. So let our prayer be this: **Thy** kingdom come. With every breath, with every worry, with every plan: **Thy** kingdom come.

Let us pray: Thy kingdom come in us and through us, we pray. Amen.