

Jeff's Reflection – Aug 1

If you want to ensure that people understand what you said, you might say it...and then say it again. Even better, you might say it, and then say it again in a slightly different way.

This happens regularly in the writings of the Old Testament.

We can see this in a number of the Psalms:

Psalms 68:

“Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth
Sing the glory of God's name”

Psalms 70:

“Be pleased O God to deliver me
O Lord, make haste to help me.”

Say it once, then say it again, only with different words.

We find this language pattern in the words of the Lord's Prayer that we consider today:

“Your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

‘Your kingdom come’ equals “your will be done on earth!”

Most North Americans don't have first-hand experience of kingdoms. There is the British Royal Family, and there are a number of other countries with royal families – Norway, Belgium, Denmark, Saudi Arabia – to name a few.

So the language of ‘your kingdom come’ seems both familiar and unfamiliar to most of us. Saying to God, ‘your kingdom come’ would seem to ask that God's kingdom replace other kingdoms; that the world be ruled by God.

The next line of the prayer helps – your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Okay, so if God's kingdom comes on earth, then earth will apparently run as efficiently as heaven does, and people will do what God wants them to do; we will live as God wants us to live.

Some contemporary translators try to convey the sense of God's will be done by changing the word ‘kingdom’ to the word ‘kin-dom’ (K-I-N), praying ‘thy kindom come’, as a way of saying that God's will is that we recognize each other as children of God and that God's will is lived out when we live in neighbourly and just relations. It's another way into understanding the prayer.

For Jesus' disciples, I think the word ‘kingdom’ had historical and contemporary connections. Originally, the slaves who followed Moses out of Egypt live as tribes and extended families, with leaders arising and being appointed to deal with specific emerging situations or crises.

But they saw other people organized under the rule of kings – other countries with strong armies and impressive fortresses and seemingly strong economies, and they wanted to be like those countries, so they called out to God to give them a king.

God didn't think that was such a good idea. God told the prophet Samuel to tell the people that being ruled by a king came with a price – kings conscripted youth to serve in their armies and security systems, kings taxed people to maintain the kingdom's armies as well as the kings' palaces their high standard of living, and kings would eventually want everyone's land, and their crops, and their vineyards, because kings want to be king of everything.

Samuel told the people, they thought about it for a second or two, and then said – we want a king! We want to be like everyone else. So Samuel anointed Saul as king. Saul would be followed by David, who was followed by his son Solomon – who amassed great wealth and essentially became the kind of king that God had warned about.

But, in the time of Jesus, the people had a more concrete and immediate experience of living in a kingdom, because they were subjects of the Roman Empire, of Rulers proclaimed as gods or sons of gods, of a kingdom established and maintained by violence. Remember, Jesus will be executed as a prisoner of the Roman Empire – he would be crucified – a cruel and painful form of torture relieved only by the victim's person's inevitable death.

So, to pray “your kingdom come on earth” was not just to pray some pious words, it was to ask God to get them out of the kingdom they were in!

So, what does God's kingdom look like? What does God's will on earth look like?

Jesus talked about the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven. Jesus talked about the kingdom in the same way as he talked about many things- with stories, parables, images, inferences.

The kingdom of heaven is like someone who discovers a treasure in a field and then sells all his or her possessions in order to buy the field. The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. The kingdom of God is like a sower who tosses seeds all over the place – some of which are lucky enough to land on good soil and actually produce a plant. If you want to find your way into the kingdom of God, become like a child, humble yourself, hope that you end up last so that you will be the first when you get there....

Rome's kingdom might not be pleasant, but at least you could describe it on a postcard. What is this kingdom of God – a hidden treasure worth everything you have accumulated in life? A mustard seed – which produces a plant with some medicinal and spicy qualities, but which could also spread exponentially and take over any garden? A hit-and-miss growth potential in places of hard, unwelcoming and maybe rich soil? A place where rather than growing up, you have to grow down and become a child?

We are left still wondering – this kingdom is not quite a program, not quite a place, not quite...well...not quite like any kingdom we have ever heard of.

But Jesus lived in this kingdom, lived doing the will of God, lived compassion, blessing, healing, befriending ...and dying on a cross.

To pray “your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” is not to state a creed, but to invite God to invite us into God’s way in the world: God’s strange way of weaving, folding, shattering, rearranging, hiding, revealing, of receiving welcome and receiving rejection, of hinting and surprising and ...

To pray these words is to already open hearts and imaginations to the possibility of a new way of living, to an awareness of already having one foot on earth and one foot in heaven, to a faith that we live and love in God, and that whatever this kingdom of God is, it is already around, amongst and within us.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. AMEN