

“Grounded in Prayer: Our God’s Reign
Matthew 13:31-33, 44-46
July 27 and August 4, 2019
Gregory D. Cox

Let us pray:

Almighty and gracious God, what a day you have given to us. You have given us everything that we need and more and we are going to lift up your mighty name in praise and prayer this morning. As we dive deeper into our relationship with you, help us to understand you more and more and just how much you desire to be in a richer more vibrant relationship with you. Help us to slow down for just a moment and allow your word to transform us, not just for today but for our entire lives. This we pray in the mighty and matchless name of Jesus. Amen.

Back in 1998, Tracy and I were returning from North Carolina to begin our first appointments in the northern reaches of our annual conference. Tracy will tell you - her words not mine - that she was great with child.

We had been under a doctor’s care in North Carolina and when arrived in Titusville and established a relationship with a doctor, we were initially chastised for waiting 8.5 months to see a doctor - that is until we produced the very thick file from the clinic in North Carolina. The midwife apologized for her quick rebuke but indicated that it was not uncommon in a rural area for people to neglect certain aspects of their maternal and even pre and post maternal care.

I say all of that - because less than three weeks later.

Many of you know that Tracy had very difficult pregnancies. Blood pressure was always a great concern not only for her but for our children and all three of the deliveries were induced.

To be sure - the 20th of July and into the early hours of July 21 were filled with a lot of anxiety. Like many expecting fathers, there isn’t much to do in the early hours, but to watch monitors and bit of TV. I was getting pretty good at understanding the ups and downs of contractions - not from the physical stress that Tracy was experiencing - but from the

rise and the fall of a line on a screen. Blood pressure cuffs also have that distinctive buzz as they periodically inflate, and slowly deflate, registering the latest blood pressure.

Inducing labor in a patient with blood pressure concerns is a delicate process. I didn't know it at the time, but quickly came to understand that the medicine used to speed up the labor can increase blood pressure and the medicine preferred during those precious moments can actually counteract the medicine to promote labor. Add to the fact that you want to deliver a baby as quickly as possible to not stress either mother or child, you don't want it too fast so as to not stress mother or child.

It was about 10 pm, both Tracy and I were weary from the long day when alarms began to sound. Tracy's blood pressure had risen to an alarming level, and the nurse who was now on duty was quickly trying to assess the health of Tracy and the baby. She quickly left the room, I heard a faint phone conversation - and when she returned to the room, all she said was - this might be a good time for you to take a walk.

Not before I was even out of my chair - Tracy simply said - please pray with me.

Pray! You want me to pray? What am I supposed to pray in a moment like this? Words were escaping me. I didn't know what was happening let alone know how to pray. Without thinking - the words came out.

Our Father, who art in heaven hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever - Amen.

And with that - I left the room and did what I was told. I was about to be a new father and I was leaving my wife and soon to be baby in the hands of a couple of nurses, a doctor - and most importantly into the hands of God.

What are your deepest prayers? For that matter - when do you pray? For what do you pray?

Do you pray about the ordinary and the mundane? Do you have active conversations with the one who wants to be in the deepest relationship with you, or do you only pray when the going gets beyond the place where you want it to be?

What do you tend to pray about most often? People, situations, your life? Do you find yourself stuck in a mode of repetition?

All of those questions were probably ones that were even running through the minds of the Disciples when they asked Jesus a simple question - **Jesus, how should we pray?**

And like the minds of the disciples, you and I have from time to time asked some of those same questions. And that's why we are sharing in this series entitled "Grounded In Prayer" It is a series for us to look into those simple and yet complex questions.

The Lord's Prayer isn't the only way to pray, and certainly it's not the only answer on how to prayer - but it is a model of how we can pray and how that prayer with and through God can take us to a deep place of connection with the one who created all things.

Last week, Pastor David preached a message about that deep relationship that we have in prayer with our heavenly father and how that relationship reminds us of God's sovereignty and power in our lives. Prayer deepens that relationship just like conversation can deepen a relationship with one of your closest friends or even your children or spouse.

So it is that this week we dive deeper and deeper into the prayer to understand God's kingdom here and now, and yet also God's will for our lives.

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

Jesus talked a lot about the Kingdom of Heaven and was imploring his followers to be a part of God's miraculous indwelling of that heavenly kingdom. It was just as misunderstood as it is today, and yet Jesus was always talking about how the Kingdom of God would be manifest right here and now.

He told them parables using familiar words and examples from their everyday life - they were examples that they could grasp - they understood the magnitude of the words and the importance of them - but at the same time they struggled with just how to make those stories stick.

The kingdom might seem insignificant - but praying for that indwelling and out breaking - can allow God's power to transform and take hold.

The mustard seed is certainly not the smallest seed known to humanity today, but it is the smallest seed that was used and cultivated by farmers and gardens at the time. Given the right conditions and the right cultivation, the smallest of seeds that can be planted can amount to be the biggest and tallest plants known to exist.

And when it does - it will be so big - Jesus said, that they birds will come from all around and rest and perch in its branches.

Or how about yeast. Yeast for Jesus was a symbol of growth and multiplication. Just as yeast has the power to grow and expand in a lump of dough - so shall the kingdom grow in a person's life.

And finally - Jesus tells us wonderful stories of the Kingdom being so valuable that it is like a treasure that's been hidden in a field and when a person finds it, they are willing to sell all that they have just to have it.

Not an implication that you can somehow buy the kingdom of God - but it is that rich that you would do anything to be a part of it.

The influence and the position of the kingdom and the reign of God is so important and yet so complex. God's Kingdom is all around us and yet at the same time, it is something that has yet to be.

There's no simple way to say it. **God's kingdom is both "now" and "not yet."** It is a present reality and yet also a future promise. We talk all the time about living in God's Kingdom and often sing hymns about it, and at the same time we seek that God would establish his kingdom on earth - and we ask for it to come soon.

There is intentionality in God's kingdom being a spiritual reality now. And yet for all of us, it is only something that will be fully realized when Christ returns.

Everything that we do today, in the present, matters. And yet, everything that we pray for will also be a future anticipation of what is to come.

Herein lies the complexity of the prayer. Do you sit and contemplate what it is that you are asking for?

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

Are you praying for the strength to be a part of something larger than you are today, for God's spirit to dwell in you to be a part of God's miraculous outbreak in this world in which we live, to allow others to come to know Christ and all that he has to offer - no matter what?

Are you praying that God's increase would be such that you would be a part of something that God is already doing in the lives of others and in this community, that God's will and God's understanding of how we should be living would be more and more a reality today?

Praying this part of the Lord's Prayer takes courage. It takes us into places that we would not have expected to go and asks God to lead us in ways that we ourselves may not expect. Praying this prayer is about allowing God's holy will and omnipotent power to transform us - and not just about knowing that that is, but actually living it out.

What does it look like to have more people come into relationship with Jesus? This is a prayer that can lead us to an answer.

What does it look like to bring an end to violence in our community and throughout the world - God's will can prove a way forward

What does it look like to understand Ingomar's next strategy to be a light in this community - this prayer can start that change.

What does it look like for your life to mirror that of Jesus, what it means to submit - pray this prayer.

We pray for so many reasons, but do we really know what we are praying and how powerful that prayer can be?

Thy kingdom come, they will be done - on earth as it is in heaven.

I've often wondered in the 21st century whether we truly understand what God's kingdom looks like and can truly look like. I wonder whether we have given up at considering the goodness of God and what it might look like for a powerful outbreak of God's love in our lives might look like.

Is the kingdom of God some walled community, an exclusive club, a broken vessel or even something that we cannot grasp? Sometimes I wonder what it is that God is thinking about. I pray about those things.

When we pray, we are praying for God's will to be revealed in our lives. God show me your kingdom. Reveal something new. Where is it that I need to be? God - there is so much going on in the world today - is this what you had in mind? How can your kingdom be different, more alive. God bring forth your kingdom and make it a present reality for us today.

Over the past few weeks, I have been once again captivated by historical events surrounding the moon landing on July 20th 1969 and the 50th anniversary of those historic steps. We have been reminded of those events and I have been reading articles and even seeing stories written about what it took to get there.

I remember as a child being slightly confused by the Apollo missions and the numbers and the significance of them. I just assumed that we had failed 10 previous times before we actually succeeded at touching down on the surface of the moon.

Having not been born until 1970, the events leading up to that historic first step on the moon is just that - an historic account.

One of the events that has always captivated my attention and imagination was Apollo 8. For those of you who like me were not alive and for those who need a reminder, Apollo 8 was only the second manned spaceflight of the Apollo program and was the first to leave earth's orbit and move into lunar orbit, circumnavigate the moon and return. This was

a very important flight in the overall objective of landing a man on the moon.

It took nearly three days to get to lunar orbit. Apollo 8 circumnavigated the moon 11 times in its mission. But what is most striking to me in all the stories that I have heard and read, it was also the first time that man, that we, that humanity had ever seen the earth from that perspective. Before that time, there were always theories, there were always stories - but for the first time - eyes were able to see what God had always seen.

And on Christmas Eve 1968, in a broadcast to the world, we saw for the very first time earth from heaven.

Video

Bill Anders, one of the crew of Apollo 8 was once quoted as saying, “it was ironic that we had done all this work to come and explore the moon and what we really discovered was the earth.”

In the beginning God Created - God Created a vast majestic creation - his kingdom and he called it good. He places us in it to be a part of something great, but it doesn't just happen. We are a part of something that can change life and change the direction of lives that seem directionless.

God's kingdom is indeed good and being grounded in prayer we have the opportunity to participate in the wonders of all that God is already doing. Do we have the courage to actually see the earth, God's kingdom, as he created it?

Better yet - do we have the courage that it takes to:

Be a part of peace making
Be a part of feeding the hungry
Be a part of providing the gift of clean water
Be a part of saved lives
Be a part of relationship building
Be a part of multiplication
Be a part of that which God calls good.

Let us pray: