

LINING UP WITH GOD
Matthew 6:9-14
Second Sunday in Lent, 2017
Sunrise Presbyterian Church
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Children often repeat what they hear or think they hear: One young boy began the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father, who are in heaven, Howard be thy name." Another young man prayed to "Harold." A little girl heard the same phrase as "Our Father who art in heaven, how didja know my name?" Still another child believed he was praying for his little sister to get into trouble, so he perceived the line to be, "Lead a snot into temptation." Children say the darndest things . . . but then, when we pray the same words, what do we think the Lord's Prayer means? Are we praying to Harold or Howard? Are we praying the prayer because we have always said the words? Are we just mumbling along - mouthing the words?

I ask these questions as we continue our Lenten sermon series on the Lord's Prayer. We are examining the prayer in its context in Matthew's gospel - right in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. Biblical commentator Eugene Boring notes that in Matthew, prayer is not a matter of informing God what we need, but rather it is a matter of "aligning ourselves in trust and acknowledging our need."ⁱ In other words: Prayer is standing in God's line - prayer is standing with God.

The first petition for which we pray in the Lord's Prayer is "Thy Kingdom Come." We pray that God's Kingdom come to us - here on earth as it is in heaven - and I venture we might all struggle to put words to what God's Kingdom might look like. It's worth unpacking the phrase - and it's easier to begin with descriptions of the Kingdom of Heaven which do NOT do it justice.

Some say that the Kingdom of Heaven is the church. Well, heavens, no! We are NOT the Kingdom of God - but the Kingdom can be made manifest through us - we can and often do see glimpses of God's Kingdom here at Sunrise. A few weeks ago one of our children turned to another child and said, "Don't worry, you will never be judged here. You will be accepted for who you are." The Kingdom of God was very close that day.

It's also tempting to say that the Kingdom of God is located in our social programs. We work hard at Sunrise to help make sure people have food to eat: the Souper Bowl, Project Salina, the Commodities Program, the Emergency Aid Food Bank and the Hunger Barrel are programs near and dear to our identity. We are proud as Presbyterians of the work of our One Great Hour of Sharing Offering. Presbyterians were the only denomination in Flint, Michigan giving out

bottled water on a long term basis. These programs represent our efforts to heal brokenness in our world - but they alone do not bring the Kingdom of God. In the early 20th Century there was optimism that the 20th Century would be a *Christian Century*. Indeed, the fine theological journal I've read throughout my career, *The Christian Century*, takes its name from that optimism. The sad reality is that the 20th Century was painfully non-Christian. We did not and are not establishing the Kingdom of God on earth.

I sometimes hear people refer to the Kingdom of God as if it were a personal and subjective experience. We pat our hearts - and say the Kingdom is in us. It's easy to turn inward and focus on our own spiritual growth. However, in the Bible, "the Kingdom is the sovereign activity of God in the word and history, and is never located in the heart."ⁱⁱⁱ We recall God's acting through Abraham and Moses - Miriam and Naomi. Time and again in story after Biblical story - God acts through people - people not unlike us.

One of my heroes in the faith, Jim Wallis of the Sojourners community, told a story recently about one of those times when he saw God's Kingdom in his midst. It was about his friend and mentor, Meg Glover. Wallis began his ministry by moving into one of the poorest communities in Washington, D.C. - Ms. Glover's neighborhood. He wrote: "In response to growing need, we joined with neighbors to start a simple food line on Saturday mornings, where many people lined up . . . to get a big bag of groceries that would feed their families through the week. Volunteers, many of whom actually needed their own bags of groceries, came to put all the bags together each week before we opened the line. Once everything was ready, we prayed. Mary Glover, a powerful Pentecostal woman of faith, would always pray; she prayed like someone who knew whom she was talking to, and it was clear that she and her Lord were in regular communication." Wallis continues, "She prayed, "Thank you Lord, for waking me up this morning; that the walls of my room were not the walls of my grave, and my bed was not my cooling board. Lord, we know that you will be coming through this line today, so Lord, help us to treat you well. Amen." He says that "She was able to see Jesus and to point to him in the hungry people coming through the food line. "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat ... As you have done to the least of these you have done to me."

Ms. Glover was a sign of God's Kingdom for Jim Wallis. Jim Wallis often reminds me to look for God's Kingdom - God's Kingdom is found where there is no violence - where guns aren't important - where people don't hit back. God's Kingdom is made up of the mourners - the poor in spirit - the persecuted - the meek - God's Kingdom is not fancy. God's Kingdom is not wealthy - it is rich in grace and overflowing in mercy. God's Kingdom is not like earthy kingdoms - God's

Kingdom invites the least among us to be first - God's Kingdom invites us all to be part of it.

When we pray that God's Kingdom come - we pray that God's shalom will be here - in Salina with us. Commentator Eduard Schweitzer notes: "That when we pray and concern ourselves with God - his name, his Kingdom, but most of all his will— our needs will be met, and met better than by any amount of concern for ourselves."ⁱⁱⁱ

Getting in line with God is a matter of keeping the vision of God's Kingdom in our hearts and minds. It's a matter of looking for that Kingdom - and it's a matter of lending our hands and feet - our hearts and minds every time we see God at work. That is - after all - our prayer. Amen.

ⁱ Eugene Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew" in *The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VIII*, p. 202.

ⁱⁱ Ibid. 293.

ⁱⁱⁱ E. Schweitzer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, p. 153.