

Lord's Prayer 2
02 June 13

"Your Will, Your Kingdom, Your Values"

As I begin this second sermon in the series on the Lord's Prayer I want to encourage you again to pray this prayer each day out loud in your household and to meditate on it. This is a rare opportunity to be engaged with this prayer each day and then be engaged with it in a wholly different way on Sunday morning. A rare opportunity. Don't blow it!

Since I do want to encourage meditation, let me start again this week inviting you to reflect on the nature of prayer. A man named John Riches once wrote, "I used to write in my daily calendar '7- 7:30 a.m.: Prayer.' But many times I passed that up. It was one more thing to pass by that day. Now I write '7-7:30 a.m.: God.' Somehow that's a little harder to neglect." Yes, the nature of prayer is not task or agenda item. If it were, it could be crossed off as an accomplishment, disposed of for the day, added as a notch in our spiritual belts. But pretty much anyone who prays knows instinctively that this can't be right.

Instead, the nature of prayer is relationship. Not that we always treat it that way. Sometimes we treat prayer as if it *were* a task, an agenda item to be crossed off. Part of the reason for that is that we spend most or all of our prayer time talking and little or none of our prayer time listening. We ought to know better. I mean that's not how we do things in our other relationships. At least I hope not!

In our other relationships we know that it's vital for there to be give and take. If we pay no attention to the other, we're not going to have a relationship worthy of the name. That coin of paying attention has another side to it. The other side is sharing something of who we are, where we are, what is on our minds and hearts. The less of that we do, the shallower the relationship. The more of that we do, the more vulnerable we will be. Now apply that to prayer. Well, that's a whole different sermon, isn't it? And if your mind wants to drift off in that direction, go ahead; I think you'll find it productive. For now, let's just say that if the nature of prayer is relationship, then give and take is required, and one of the things that means listening.

In last week's sermon I spoke a little bit about listening. I said that silence is really a key element of prayer. Sometimes in a good relationship two people are together without speaking. Sometimes what is called for is being together rather than doing together. If you can think of prayer time not as an agenda item to be crossed off but rather as time with God, then just being together in prayer will make sense to you.

Just being together, being silent, waiting for the other to speak is one way to listen. The Lord's Prayer invites us into another, different way to listen. And that is to call to mind again all the things the other has said in the past and be conscious of the path this relationship has taken. That's what Jesus invites us to do in the Lord's Prayer.

Another way to say this is to ask to what Jesus first draws our attention in this prayer. It's not us

or our needs. It's on God the Father, God's holiness, God's kingdom, God's will. I can't stress that enough. People focused in on themselves are unhappy people. Congregations focused in upon themselves are unhappy and often conflicted congregations. Congregations focused on doing ministry beyond their walls and beyond their membership are happy ones, and they're often growing. Jesus in the prayer he taught us draws us away from ourselves. *Your* kingdom come; *Your* will be done. Not mine; *yours*.

Your kingdom. What is God's kingdom? What does God's rule look like? A number of years ago, church council asked itself just that question and attempted to answer that question by looking at all the verses in the Gospel of Matthew in which Jesus talks about God's kingdom. What they found is printed on an insert in today's blue pages. What council found was that when God's kingdom is at work there is repentance and fruit bearing, freedom from worry and from self-righteousness, wonder, innocence, mercy begetting more mercy. I challenge you to take that insert home, put it up on your refrigerator and read it and meditate on it each day this week. This is what you are praying for in the Lord's Prayer. You can slide right by it if you want, but *this* is what Jesus first draws your attention to.

Jesus invites us to be silent before God, recalling to mind all the things that God wants *for* us and *from* us. *Your* kingdom come.

And now I want to say a word about God's will. Your will be done is pretty close to another of saying your kingdom come, for where the values of the kingdom are at work, there God's will is done. Every decade or so someone writes a book claiming to discover some hidden secrets in the Bible. As if the Bible were a magic book of spells that had to be ferreted out. I don't think that's right. The God I find in the Scriptures is less interested in the chosen few than in the loved many. Jesus didn't die for the few who are able to find the hidden secret. Jesus died because God loved the whole world and every one in it. Jesus was lifted up on the cross to draw all people to himself.

If that's true, then why would God's will be any different? God's will is not some hidden secret to be ferreted out. It's plain as day. Jesus put it this way, God's commandment to us is that we love God with all we've got and love our neighbors as ourselves. Granted, figuring out how best to do that can be a little confusing sometimes. But God's will is clear. And it is not to be separated from who God is and how God reigns. Which brings us back to the kingdom. You want to know what God's will is? Look to what Jesus said about the greatest commandment. Look to what Jesus said about what the kingdom of God is like. You'll find this easy to do because when you get home you're putting that insert up on your refrigerator, right?