

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 21 2008

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HYMNS: 55, 458: 3, 264, 507, 48.

LESSONS: Psalm 45: 6-17, Galatians 5: 19 – 6:10, Matthew 13: 24-33 or Mark 4: 26-32

TEXT: Luke 11:2c, *Thy kingdom come.*

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Suppose you lived in an oppressive country where you were a slave and had no hope, and heard about another country and a great leader of another nation who was kind, generous, really cared for his people, and had set all the slaves free. Wouldn't you want to send a message to him and ask 'O great leader, make us part of your nation?' 'Rule over us.' Or if you heard of such a nation, wouldn't you make every effort to go and live there? No, I'm not talking about all those people who want to immigrate to the United States of America to live here. I'm talking about people who are slaves to sin, slaves to the devil, and have no hope but eternal death and damnation.

Think for a moment about what we're asking in this petition: Dear father in Heaven who has all power, please let us live in your kingdom! Today, let's consider

THY KINGDOM COME

- 1. We pray in this petition that God's kingdom may also come to us**
- 2. God's kingdom comes through the work of his Holy Spirit and his Holy Word.**
- 3. We are in God's kingdom when we believe his holy Word and lead a godly life now on earth and forever in heaven.**

Today I'd like to start with Luther's explanation from the Small Catechism. **Thy kingdom come.** *What does this mean? God's kingdom certainly comes by itself even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may also come to us. How does God's kingdom come? God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word and lead a godly life now on earth and forever in heaven.*

But isn't it important to know just what this kingdom is? Of course. We start with the idea that a true knowledge of God's kingdom is a gift of divine revelation. It begins with the work of the Holy Spirit. *"No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost"* (1 Corinthians 12:3 KJV). *"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Romans 10:17 KJV). God elaborates on this and tells us how believers are brought into the kingdom of heaven in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 *"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."*

Jesus himself often uses parables to explain the kingdom of God, as in our Gospel lesson. Matthew says *"kingdom of heaven"*, Mark says *"kingdom of God"*. The two are synonyms. In addition, Jesus makes it clear that it is not an earthly kingdom, nor will it ever be as some people claiming the name of Christian claim – such as millennialists – those who believe that Jesus will rule on earth for 1000 years before judgment day. Jesus plainly tells us in *"Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus*

replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you.'" (Luke 17:20-21) When asked by Pontius Pilate if he was a king, we read in John 18:36 *"Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.'"* St. Paul tells us in Romans 14:17 *"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,"* and in 1 Corinthians 4:20 *"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power."*

What is necessary to have a kingdom – even an earthly kingdom? You need three things: A King, or a ruler. You need subjects – people to rule. And you need a place to rule.

In speaking of the kingdom of God and of Christ, we recognize God as the ruler. The subjects are all believers in Christ as their Savior. And the place? Here on earth it is the hearts of believers. In eternity after the judgment of all men, it will be the place of joy and happiness in heaven.

Unlike some earthly kingdoms *God's kingdom certainly comes by itself even without our prayer.* Nevertheless we pray that it may come to us, that is, that it prevail among us and with us, so that we may be a part of those among whom His name is hallowed and His kingdom prospers.

So how do we react when we come upon people who are or live like they are outside the kingdom of God? Believers, in their joy as children of God, will surely also want to share their great spiritual blessings with those who do not have these blessings. Following their Lord's command they will want to proclaim his saving truth so that God's kingdom might be extended everywhere.

Another Christian wrote that God's kingdom is his gracious working for the salvation of sinners. We may think of four phases in his kingdom. First there was the time of preparation stretching all the way from the forming of his eternal counsel in eternity up to the fullness of time. Second there was the time of fulfillment in the incarnation and ministry and death and resurrection and ascension of our Savior. Third there is the present time of outreach to the nations and building of the Holy Christian Church on earth. And fourth, there is the "time" in eternity when the elect will have been fully gathered in and will live with their Lord in everlasting glory.

When we pray that our Father's kingdom may come, we must recall with heartfelt gratitude what he has done to save the world. He sent his only begotten Son Jesus Christ to live as a man, to obey God's law perfectly in their place, and to die in the place of all humans. We think also of the closing prayer in the Bible: ***"Come, Lord Jesus"*** (Revelation 22:20). But our thoughts will turn in particular to what our Father is doing now for the salvation of sinners, a work in which he has made us his partners and instruments.

When we pray that our Father's kingdom may come, we are led to think of the many souls out there who are not calling upon the name of the Lord because they have never heard the gospel. We want our Father so to shape the course of events that they may have the opportunity to hear. If even one of them should cross our path – and doesn't that happen frequently? – we want our Father to make us ***"prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have"*** (1 Peter 3:15). We tend to live in one place. But everywhere out there are souls who are ***"harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd"*** (Matthew 9:36). They need to be reached. Since ***"the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few"*** (Matthew 9:37), praying that our Father's kingdom come will include asking ***"the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field"*** (Matthew 9:38). Mission work is not an expendable luxury but one of the chief reasons for the existence of the church. We would not be here if it were not for mission work. So we should think in terms of "God, let your kingdom come to many others".

But we must also look at ourselves when we pray for the coming of our Father's kingdom. Not only is it to grow out like a mustard seed but also to permeate inward like leaven. (Remember our Gospel lesson?) The New Testament is full of terms like edification and growing. Paul admonished the Corinthians because they could handle only milk and not meat. Peter exhorts: ***“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”*** (2 Peter 3:18). We must use the tools God has given us for our personal growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must frequently and regularly place ourselves at Jesus' feet so that we may grow spiritually. We must not be content with the status quo in our spiritual lives.

We are praying *that by his grace we believe his holy Word and lead a godly life now on earth and forever in heaven*. Yes, this kingdom is here and now. Believers say with Paul: ***“Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living”*** (Romans 14:8,9). But this time of human life is short. Eternity beckons. Convinced that there is salvation in no other name but the name of Jesus, believers will certainly want to be about their heavenly Father's business, proclaiming that name to the ends of the earth so that people everywhere can be assured of eternal happiness in God's kingdom of glory. Throughout the history of New Testament Christianity, we have read about how the hearts of Christians in some of the most deprived and remote corners of this world find this joyful assurance in their Savior-King. Often we have read that they appreciate God's grace in Christ in far greater measure than people who are literally surrounded by the so-called “good” things of this life.

With Luther we can join in confessing our Lord in these words: *“Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent sufferings and death; that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness; even as he is risen from death, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.”*

To summarize, we look again at Luther's large Catechism: The coming of God's Kingdom to us occurs in two ways; first, here in time through the Word and faith; and secondly, in eternity forever through revelation. In this petition we pray for two things: one that it may come to those who are not yet in the kingdom of God, and two, that it come repeatedly to us who have been made part of the gracious rule of Christ in our lives, that we increasingly and daily live as God's people, here on earth and hereafter in eternal life. All this is nothing else than saying: Dear Father, we pray, give us first Thy Word, that the Gospel be preached in its truth and purity throughout the world; and secondly, that it be received in faith, and work and live in us, so that through the Word and the power of the Holy Ghost Thy kingdom may prevail among us, and the kingdom of the devil be put down, that he may have no right or power over us, until at last the devil's kingdom shall be utterly destroyed, and sin, death, and hell shall be exterminated, that we may live forever in perfect righteousness and blessedness.

In the beautiful Reformation hymn we sing about the kingdom of God:
*“A mighty Fortress is our God,
A trusty Shield and Weapon.
Though devils all the world should fill,
All eager to devour us.
We tremble not, we fear no ill,
They shall not overpower us.”*

And we conclude that hymn with the words
*“They yet have nothing won;
The Kingdom ours remaineth.” Amen*

(First preached 8/24/2008)