

Journey

Day 7—Wednesday

Your kingdom come . . .

Now we will study for a week what we could profitably spend a year—or more! We will be thinking together about the one thing that Jesus seemed to think about most—the kingdom of God. In the Gospels, the word *kingdom* appears some 123 times; Jesus uses the word 98 times. It is at the heart of his message. Mark—the earliest of all the Gospels—records the beginning of Jesus’ ministry this way: “Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news’” (Mark 1:14-15).

And the “good news,” of course, is that the kingdom is for everyone. The only ones excluded are those who exclude themselves, those who—for one reason or another—do not want to live under the rule of God.¹²

Which brings us to a paradox: the kingdom both is and is not. It has begun in the life of Jesus, and it continues to spread in and through the lives of people who follow Jesus—but it has not yet come in its fullness and completeness. The world is still mostly a mess. All creation does not yet live under the rule of God. When we pray “your kingdom come,” we are praying for *God* to make his rule complete, we are praying for God to clean up the mess we have made. But, we are also praying that God’s kingdom would come to and through us; we are praying that we would live faithfully under God’s rule, that we would be part of the clean-up team.

Even a quick reading of the Gospels is enough to show that the kingdom of God, the rule of God, is the rule of love and justice. The rule of God is the rule of compassion and mercy, the rule of forgiveness. The rule of God is the rule of equity, of dignity, of peace and prosperity for all—not for the few at the expense of the many, but for all. The rule of God, in short, is the rule of life—fullness and richness of life for everyone. That’s what we ask God to make happen when we pray “your kingdom come.” And we also ask for the grace to help make it happen.

Biblical Wisdom

Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among [and within]¹³ you."

Luke 17:20-21

Theological Thoughts

[God's kingdom comes] whenever our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that through his grace we believe his Holy Word and live godly lives here in time and hereafter in eternity.¹⁴

Silence for Meditation

Questions to Ponder

- Does it surprise you that the kingdom of God was the centerpiece of Jesus' teaching? Why or why not?
- Does it change your thinking to consider the kingdom of God as the "rule" or "reign" of God? Explain.
- What are the implications for the church in saying that "the kingdom both is and is not"?

Psalm Fragment

*For the word of the LORD is upright,
and all his work is done in faithfulness.*

*He loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.*

Psalm 33:4-5

Journal Reflections

- Write a short meditation on what it means to you to live under the rule of God.
- Write a short meditation describing your relationship to God at this moment.
- In what ways is "the kingdom of God . . . among [and within] you"?

Prayer for Today

God of justice, remind me today that I am living under your rule, within your kingdom. Amen.

Journey

Day 8—Thursday

Your kingdom come . . .

People are interested in power, interested in being in control, in calling the shots, in setting the agenda. People care about position and privilege. But not in the kingdom of God.

Once when Jesus' followers were worrying about divvying up the positions of power and privilege in the kingdom, Jesus set them straight by saying, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:25b-26). Jesus turns things upside down. That's the way it is under the rule of God.

On another occasion, his followers (who were often a bit slow to catch on) asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" His answer: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:1-4).

The kingdom of God is a relationship between us and God in which we acknowledge our dependence upon God. Children are good at this. Children are very relational creatures. Indeed, nothing matters more than their relationships with parents, siblings, relatives, and others who love them and care for them—and who they love back. They don't need to acknowledge their dependence, it goes without saying, and it's not a bad thing—it is just the way the world is for them. And (in a good family) the very young live joyfully in the confidence that the "rule" of their parents is naturally good.

As children grow from toddlerhood to adulthood, however, this broken world of ours teaches them different ways of being. Power, position, and privilege become quite important—as they were to Jesus’ earliest followers. Perhaps that’s why Jesus’ announcement of the good news of the kingdom or rule of God was accompanied by the call to repent, the call to turn around and return to the childlike faith that what God wants for us and from us is and always will be good.

Biblical Wisdom

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.”

Matthew 19:14

Theological Thoughts

When we pray “Thy kingdom come,” we are not relying on our virtue or ingenuity, or even our understanding of what we ask for, but on the power of the Holy Spirit to help us welcome God’s loving interventions.¹⁵

Silence for Meditation

Questions to Ponder

- Why is power (the ability to control others) not a characteristic of the kingdom of God?
- When Jesus calls us to be “humble” like a child, what do you think he means by humility?
- Is Jesus’ call to repent a threat or a promise (law or gospel)? Explain.

Psalm Fragment

*But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.*

Psalm 131:2

Journal Reflections

- Make a list of the ways in which you exercise power over others. How do you use your power? Anything you might need to repent of?
- In what (if any) ways do your human relationships mirror your relationship with God?
- Write about the differences between “childlike” faith and “childish” faith. How would you describe your faith?

Prayer for Today

God, help me become aware of the ways in which I exercise power in my relationships and give me the grace to serve rather than be served. Amen.

Journey

Day 9—Friday

Your kingdom come . . .

Most of us worry a lot. We are fearful creatures, full of anxiety. There seems to be good reason. We live in a competitive if not cutthroat world, and we wonder and worry if there will be enough for us. It is hard to feel secure when financial institutions fail, when prices go up and salaries don't, when the housing market collapses, when pensions fold, when healthcare costs skyrocket, when both personal and national debt goes through the roof. Most of us worry a lot—both the well-off and the not-so-well-off. When we pray “your kingdom come,” we are seeking a way out of worry, a way beyond fear.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus shows a deep understanding of human anxiety. He pinpoints our many worries about what we will eat and what we will drink and what we will wear—metaphors for the many fears, anxieties, desires, cares, and distractions that constantly consume us. Then he asks a question that we would all do well to ponder: “Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing, ” (Matthew 6:25-31). It is—if life is lived under the rule of God.

Rather than worry about what we will eat or drink or put on, Jesus suggests that we trust God for all that. If we did, we would discover that we need much less than we think we do to have a life that is good for us and for others. God knows what we *need*, and rather than focus on all that, we should “strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

In the Gospel of Luke, right after telling his followers to strive first for the kingdom, Jesus tells them: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). Another paradox. God *gives* us the kingdom; we must *strive* for it. God gives us the kingdom. God has created the world in such a way that if everyone were satisfied with enough there would be enough for everyone. It is for us to strive for such a reality.

When we pray “your kingdom come,” we pray that God would bring about equity and fairness and dignity and richness of life for everyone. And we pray that we would not take more than enough of what God provides until everyone has enough.

Biblical Wisdom

I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.”

2 Corinthians 8:13-15

Theological Thoughts

Unexpectedly, quite surprisingly, politics has crept into our Christian praying at this point. Here we were, talking about God, heaven, holiness, and suddenly we find ourselves in the middle of a political argument about a kingdom, transferred to some new place that calls into question the old places in which we have lived. We have not prayed, “Lord, bless our nation,” or “Lord, protect my family.” We pray “*your* kingdom come.”¹⁶

Silence for Meditation

Questions to Ponder

- Is it true that we need much less than we have to live a happy, meaningful life? Explain.
- If, as Jesus suggests, life is more than food and the body more than clothing, what is life really about?
- In what ways does your faith community both receive and strive for the kingdom of God?

Psalm Fragment

*I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.*

Psalm 16:7

Journal Reflections

- Make a list of things you worry about.
- Can you imagine a life without worry or anxiety? What would have to change to relieve your worries?
- If you were to “strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” what would that mean for you and how might that change things for you?

Prayer for Today

God, let me cast my worries on you, trusting you know better than I what I truly need. Amen.

Journey

Day 10–Saturday

Your kingdom come . . .

When we pray for the kingdom to come, we are, in a profound way, praying for love to come. Jesus rejected the then-popular notion that God’s kingdom would come through violence against those opposed to the coming of the kingdom. At