

Second Midweek, February 17, 2016, The Lord's Prayer and Jesus' Passion, 2nd Petition, "Your Kingdom Come.", St. John 18:33-37, Rev. George Ferch

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

A king is not always who he appears to be. In medieval times, a king might have disguised himself as a simple knight. Then, he could participate in the jousting tournament or other games at a local fair. The Son of God did not merely disguise himself as a man. He became a true man. As the man Jesus, God did not play games but fought and defeated sin, death, the grave and hell.

What took place between our Lord and the governor of Judea was serious business indeed. It was all part of that larger work of redemption Jesus finished so that we are reconciled to God. Jesus looked like anything but a king to Pilate, thus the searching question, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus is a king and told Pilate so. Jesus also told Pilate that before him was a king whose kingdom is different from all other kingdoms. Jesus' kingdom of not this world.

In the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, we pray that Jesus' unique kingdom comes to us and to others. Oh, it comes "by itself even without our prayer," the good doctor reminds us. "But we pray in this petition that it may also come to us." So, we pray, "Your Kingdom Come." The second petition is part of that larger prayer our King taught us to pray; a prayer so intimately tied to the Savior's Passion.

Pontius Pilate was a second rate politician in a backwater of the Roman Empire. You might say Pilate was a big fish in a small pond. It was his duty to work with the leadership of the occupied people. This duty included pronouncing any death sentence, a power Rome had taken away from the Jews. So, the Sanhedrin had to take Jesus to Pilate. This fulfilled the Scripture that Jesus would die on the cross, not by the Sanhedrin stoning him to death.

This was not a conversation between equals. We do not have two kings here, only the King of the universe. The risen and ascended Christ rules all things for the sake of his church. This is his kingdom of power. Jesus had all power at that moment with Pilate but in his humility, the Son of Man chose not to use his power. Jesus did tell Pilate later in the conversation, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above."

When Pilate first asked Jesus if he were a king, Jesus answered yes by pointing the governor to his kingdom; a kingdom from another place, a kingdom that expands without war and weapons, a kingdom that is not a rebellion, as we heard Jesus say in Gethsemane.

Jesus' kingdom is the kingdom of grace. This kingdom is Christ's rule in our hearts by his Word. It was to establish this rule of grace the Son of God came into the world. Jesus told Pilate when he stated "You are a king then," "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth."

Jesus' continues to testify through the church to the truth that he is the Christ, the Anointed One of God, and the world's King and Savior. This is the Perfect Prophet's work through the gospel. The second petition is the church's asking God to grant success to the gospel as we preach it. We petition God that through the gospel, the means the Holy Spirit used to call us to faith, the Spirit will continue Christ's rule in our hearts. This will strengthen our faith. "Your kingdom come" is our prayer that the Holy Spirit preserves us in faith until we enter the kingdom of glory, which is heaven.

The kingdom of God is in our hearts. It is not eating and drinking in a certain visible place. The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace through the Holy Spirit. We have that righteousness and peace through our King's Passion. We have righteousness and peace because our King took the form of a servant and bore our sin and guilt. It would be woe to us had Jesus put on his glorious crown at that moment before Pilate's judgment seat, and put all his enemies in their place. Jesus' rule of grace could not begin with an outward display of all his glory and power. It began by the Son of God hiding that glory and power under humility and submission.

We enjoy a kingdom of mercy and grace in Christ's rule through his Word because our King willingly put himself under Pilate's verdict. The kingdom of grace is connected to our Savior's Passion. Jesus' suffering and death under our sentence won the day for the kingdom. The kingdom continues to win souls not by force at the end of a sword. The kingdom continues to come as the gospel adds daily to the church those who are being saved.

"Your kingdom come" is our prayer for the success of mission work here and abroad. It is our prayer that God would extend Christ's rule to the hearts of many others who are not yet Christians.

By praying the second petition we acknowledge our part in this work. God's kingdom of grace will come to lost souls whether we participate or not. By our praying, "Your kingdom come," we are saying to God we want to participate, we are participating. We want the kingdom of the Christ's gracious saving rule to come through our support and sharing the Word of Christ. What Jesus shared and we share is the truth. "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me," Jesus said.

The Word that brings the kingdom of God into sinful hearts to create new hearts is not a truth among many truths. Pilate was the prototype post-modern man who said in more a statement of his own conviction rather than a searching question, "What is truth?" People who belong to the kingdom of God, citizens of the kingdom, believers who are the church, listen to our King's truth rather than discard that truth for lies.

Martin Chemnitz, the second Luther, said we pray this petition so the Holy Spirit prevents us from ever saying of Jesus, "'We don't want this man to our king.' But ask that we are never offenses to the kingdom of God and that God never cast us out of his kingdom.

Therefore we pray, "Your kingdom come," so that we and those who believe through us sharing the Word will always say with those on Psalm Sunday, "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest." Amen. <SDG>