

On Earth as it is in Heaven

Last week we looked at prayer in general and the beginning of the Lord's Prayer in particular, we noticed that prayer is a way to connect with the divine. One thing that I did not get to mention that in the reading from Matthew 6 where Jesus talks about praying in secret because *God sees in secret*, that can have two understandings. The literal understanding would be that we do not make a big show out of our prayers, our giving, and our repentance. But a figurative understanding would tell us, remind us, that in those secret places in our heart and soul where we do not let anyone in or strictly control who has access to these secrets, *God still sees them and knows everything which we hide from everyone else or even try to hide from ourselves.*

We then saw that the beginning of this prayer is a community prayer for Jesus uses the first-person plural in describing *God - Our Father*. We also saw that this prayer has a tension built into it. While we recognize the blessings we have received from *God*, we acknowledge that things are not the way they should be, so we pray that *God's will be done*. This is a revolutionary type of prayer in that we are petitioning *God* to overthrow those in currently with the power and replace it not with another earthly kingdom, but rather with *God's kingdom*. This kingdom of *God* does not have any geographic location; rather it is located within people's hearts. It is marked by a concern for others and meeting their needs before we address our desires and wants.

These first few lines of this prayer acknowledges *God's superiority over us*, recognizes that despite this superiority we can come to *God* in an intimate,

relational way and expresses the desire for God to rule on the earth, establishing God's Kingdom on earth.

Now, we turn to the next line of this prayer, "on earth as it is in heaven." This phrase continues the submissive attitude from the line 'your will be done.' As you will recall from the story of the Creation, when God created humanity, God gave dominion over all that was on the earth to humanity. We are conceding that we have not done a real good job in that stewardship. Our mismanagement of the earth began when Adam and Eve gave into temptation and ate the forbidden fruit, trying to get something which they already had. This mismanagement has continued ever since, evidenced by the harm done to the planet, the wanton killing of various animals and the too-numerous conflicts between people. Since Adam and Eve, people have been grasping for power, not just on a national level, but also individually. This is seen in all the 'isms' that people talk about. I won't go into that just to say that people at all levels of relationships try to gain power over someone else and then exploit that power for their advantage.

We have this image that heaven is the place where everything is perfect. There is no sickness, no pain, no suffering, no sin, and no death. In this petition, we acknowledge that here on earth those conditions exist primarily because of our sinful nature and giving in to temptation from the devil. We want to be in a world where there is no suffering or pain.

When God sent Jesus to earth to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom, Jesus did not come with an army of angels behind Him slaughtering anyone who tried to resist, but Jesus came and changed people's hearts, giving them a new perspective of what could be. In the movie "Bruce Almighty" the title character wondered why God didn't just give people the miracles they prayed to have. God replied to Bruce

that it was up to him to 'be' the miracle saying, "If you want a miracle, be the miracle." We have the power to live as if we are in the Kingdom of God right now. It is just our sinful nature that is holding us back. Luther saw this and this is why he encouraged us to remember our baptism on a daily basis and to 'die' to sin each day.

Remembering that this prayer is a community prayer, then, we need to keep in mind the community aspect of these petitions. What does admitting the wrongs of the community look like? Who does it affect? How does the community actually admit to mistakes made and how is the responsibility and accountability handled? These are all questions that arise when we seriously understand what it is that we are saying when we recite the Lord's Prayer. This petition, "on earth as it is in heaven," not only highlights things that have been done wrong, but also expresses a hope to become aligned with what God wants so that we can enjoy the blessings that God gives.