

“What hope is there for change
Change has, is, will come on Earth as it is in Heaven”

Our scripture lesson this morning is from the Lord’s Prayer. The Lord’s Prayer is easily one of the most recognizable portions of our scripture in the world today. It is recited in most if not all Catholic and Protestant churches today – everyone from, Episcopalian, Baptist, Pentecostal, Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, etc. The Lord’s Prayer is recited in times of our great despair - funerals, and in times of our personal joy such as a wedding. As many of you know and experienced for yourselves, the Lord’s Prayer is recited outside the church in both small group gatherings like AAA meetings, and large group gatherings like graduations and often after tragedies like 911 or various “civil disobedience gatherings. I have read stories in which it is recited on the battlefield of wars by soldiers (often on both sides); it is recited during peace marches, pro-life rallies as well. Of course some of us pray the Lord’s Prayer during our individual devotions, our evening or morning prayers or family devotions...the list is long. Many of us have been in group settings that I have mentioned and to hear the words echo around us is as if God is right there at that moment...indeed God is there. Amen?

In fact, I would venture to guess that many of us cannot remember exactly when we learned the “Lord’s Prayer” – it kind of just “happened”, kind of like your best friend from childhood – you can’t remember when you weren’t friends. Such familiarity or comfort - even of a powerful prayer such as the “Lord’s Prayer” is that if we are not aware, we can easily forget the potentially life changing aspect of our recited words. I believe the expression of which I am referring to is **“familiarity breeds contempt”** – the notion is that the more familiar you are with a routine, the more familiar you are to the person in a relationship be it at work or in your marriage, or even a church community- that if you know someone very well or if you experience something often enough, you stop respecting them, and your relationships can become stagnate, or my daughters favorite word “bored”. It may be easy to dismiss this as foolishness but think about how enamored you were with the car when it had a new car smell, or you home when you first moved in or your children when they born...has some merit (Sabbatical understanding is key!). But let’s be honest as it relates to the Lord’s Prayer – familiarity has breed in some of us contempt in our prayer life.

- The challenge of familiarity of the Lord’s Prayer is that we fail to pause and ponder and grasp what we are actually praying, what we are actually saying –many of us have memorized it in our head but is it internalized or written on our hearts.
- The challenge of our collective familiarity of the Lord’s Prayer is that we have failed to realize the hope and possibilities for us individually as well as the hope and possibilities for change in this world right here, right now that this prayer contains.
- The challenge of our collective familiarity of the Lord’s Prayer is that we miss or fail to see the *power* possessed in the words given first to the disciples and then to each of us by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

If **“familiarity breeds contempt”** my desire this morning is to remind each of us that these powerful words of prayer given to us in scripture are not **merely words** when we have no other words to pray, nor are these familiar words, words of “contempt or boredom” but the words contained in the **Lord’s Prayer are our very words of hope for change** – The Lord’s prayer is a prayer that position this world for change. It is a prayer of hope, a hope that is inviting each of us to experience a lasting change – a transformational change beginning within our hearts, of our minds and our very bodies that will also a change that will affect our world, our community, and our homes.

It is important that we recognize the context in which our scripture lesson is found. Jesus is in the midst of what could be described as his longest sermon of the Gospel. Though some

“What hope is there for change
Change has, is, will come on Earth as it is in Heaven”

scholars would argue that this rather lengthy sermon is a compilation of many sermons – I hold to the understanding that on this rare occasion Jesus led by the Spirit of God was long winded. Unlike the many times in the Gospel in which Jesus drops a powerful parable, a stinging word of correction, or simply writes on the sand – this occasion he unloads what can only be described as a rambling sermon that covers the “hot topics or divisive topics then and today” He begins in chapter 5 of Matthew with the:

- Beatitudes – blessed are the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, merciful, peacemakers, persecuted, theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.
- Next he reminds the crowd that “you are the salt, you are the light in a world in need of flavor in illumination.
- Next Jesus tells those gathered that he has come to fulfill the law of the prophets....then he names some of the laws: Murder, Adultery, Divorce, Oaths, eye for an eye/love your enemies, giving to the poor and then Prayer which our study today.
- He continues on after the Lord’s prayer to talk about fasting, storing up treasures in Heaven vs. Earth/do not worry, judging, ask seek and knock, bearing fruit and the narrow and wide gates/the wise and foolish builder.

Wow...right? Quite impossible to live “WWJD” in our own strength – in fact there are those Christians who say these words contained in chapters 5-7 are for the day we enter heaven not while one earth... Jesus says NO to this “soon and very soon, one day notion...” Jesus says for all the world to hear – if heaven is on your mind, it should be in the context of praying that indeed **“your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** Right here, right now not tomorrow or someday! ***Aqui Hora, no otro dia pero hora! Por favor! Amen?***

What does it mean for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven? What is God’s will, anyway? And how do we do it here on earth? Another way of asking this question is: How do we make earth more like heaven – marriages, schools, church, denominations, and church folk?

Since the beginning, I believe that it has been God’s desire to impart that which is heaven on earth. If you recall in Genesis the earth started out “formless and empty,” and therefore in need of light shining into it from God and heaven. This light from God brought with it to order and harmony into the chaos. According to the creation account the lights in the expanse of the sky were needed to separate day from night, to mark seasons and days and years, and to govern all things below...._Is this not what Jesus was telling the disciples to pray **“your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven** – thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

- Also we read that in the Garden of Eden story, the Bible tells that our God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden – and though I do not fully understand all of what that means one thing is clear. The very presence of God was present on earth....once again this is the Lord’s Prayer that **your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven**. However humanity soon fell away from that which we were created, closeness to God.

From time to time, there were still glimpses of that ancient relationship between heaven and earth. In the Old Testament...

“What hope is there for change
Change has, is, will come on Earth as it is in Heaven”

- **Jacob, son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham**, got such a glimpse during a time of great personal struggle, and it gave him the strength to continue on his journey toward becoming the father of a great nation. At the time of his famous dream of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, Jacob was fleeing his home and family in fear for his life, after tricking his father and cheating his brother Esau out of the blessing that was due to the elder brother. Just when Jacob’s life seemed to have reached its low point, God gave him, in his dreams, a wonderful vision of angels ascending from earth to heaven, and descending from heaven to earth, with the Lord himself standing above it. Jacob knew then and there that his life here on earth had a higher meaning than anything he had conceived of before. God had put him on earth for a greater purpose—and his job was to follow God’s will for his life by continually working toward that greater purpose. Heaven had been opened to him, and his life would never be the same again – **your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven**

In the New Testament the Lord reminds us over and over again that we are not living for this earth only; that our life has meaning if full measure when we are seeking first the kingdom of heaven in our life, in our community and our world - here on earth. A quick glance over the NT would reveal that there are well over 100 references – especially in the Gospels you find the word “Kingdom” used: Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God”. In the Gospels we read that - The Kingdom of God is near proclaimed John the Baptist & Jesus, we read that the Kingdom of God is within us as proclaimed Jesus. We read that the kingdom has come already and found in the life, death and resurrection – and in Hebrews and Revelation we find language that a “day is coming” in which the Kingdom of God will come again in full measure, a time in which there will be a new heaven and a new earth – that which has been separated will be brought together.

- In Luke’s Gospel **Luke 18:1-8** we read of the Parable of the Persistent Widow. In the parable the widow kept coming to the judge seeking “justice”. For some time the judge refused, but the judge finally gave in and extended justice so that the widow won’t eventually wear him out! Jesus in the parable is inviting you and me just as the widow to be persistent – though he says at the end of vs. 8 “will he (Son of man) find faith on the earth? “your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.” (I am reminded of my 9 yr old Marcela who routinely says “**Are we going to have dinner today – I am hungry...**”)
- Paul in **Romans 8:22 & 26** wants us to know that at times the pain or challenges of life are so imposing we cannot form the words to pray...even the Lord’s prayer. I want you to know that you do not stand alone. Paul words are for you this morning. It reads/says:

“we know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present....in the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will (your will be done on Earth as in Heaven)

I would be remiss if I didn’t make clear that at times when praying and walking in the kingdom of heaven it means that in this life we suffer – taking up the cross. Birthing a child I hear is quite hard...Amen? Jesus at the Garden of Gethsemane – your will is hard,

“What hope is there for change
Change has, is, will come on Earth as it is in Heaven”

but if I must I will die so that your will be done on earth as it is in heaven – resurrection power!

In the context of the NT Author NT Wright writes puts it this way reflecting upon the Lord’s Prayer:

Just as Jesus taught his followers to pray that God’s Kingdom would come on earth as in heaven, so now he claims that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him, and on that basis he commands the disciples to go and make it happen! (By who’s authority?) Resurrection doesn’t mean escaping from the world it means mission to the world based on Jesus lordship over the world.

As the great hymn proclaims “He lives, He lives Christ Jesus lives today he walks with me and talks with me along life narrow way” and Because he lives, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has the authority given to him by God through the Spirit to each of us – that same authority, that same Resurrection authority to pray **that God’s Kingdom to com on earth as it is in heaven is available to us!**

The reality however is that many of us like Augustine of 6th century whose book “City of God” is hesitant to fully embrace this Kingdom understanding of the Lord’s Prayer. In the book “City of God”, Augustine proposes a battle is going on between the City of God vs. City of Man. He declares that the Kingdom of Heaven is solely spiritual not political – which I agree. Which is no small feat during this time in history because Christianity's designation as the official religion of the empire. However, Augustine would argue that Christianity “City of God” should be primarily concerned with the mystical, the spiritual, the heavenly city of the [New Jerusalem](#) - rather than with **“Thy kingdom come thy will be done on Earth as in heaven”**. We dare not do this in 2009; we must leave room in our theology where we recognize that our God is Lord over the City of God and the City of Man.

The question that remains this morning as we reflect on the Lord’s Prayer **“Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”** **What will our world look like when God’s will is done here on earth, as it is in heaven?** Let me be clear, Heaven on earth does not mean that everyone thinks and acts the same – God created a wonderful diversity of beings for a purpose and His Glory. Heaven on earth does not mean a boring sameness! What it does mean is that people of different churches, different worship styles, different personalities do not clash with one another, but instead work together in a harmonious whole. The differences do not divide; instead, they add to the perfection of the whole. A Foundational principle is prayer.

- **Pg. 118-119 “To Live In Peace” – “prayer as kingdom activity is not the last hope for the inner city; it is the beginning.”**

What does heaven look like on earth in our community look?

Vision for Mission - September, 2007

~~Oxford Circle Mennonite Church~~ envisions being a place and a people open to God’s new life. Where having experienced God’s forgiveness of sins, and having committed to imitate Christ’s

“What hope is there for change
Change has, is, will come on Earth as it is in Heaven”

example, we seek openness to God, each other, and to our larger community through the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

(a place where) We yearn for increased *wholeness* – spiritual, physical, environmental and social – towards purer hearts, healthier lifestyles, cleaner neighborhoods, and safer streets. So we commit to bold movements towards reconciliation – because God has made us right with himself through Christ. We embrace risky opportunities to love our neighbors in order to see the Spirit tear down walls of race, gender, age and class. We see this in the synergy of neighborhood residents coming to join the church, even as church members commit to live in the neighborhood. We see this through the activities of a vibrant community center, through a new, larger and more flexible space, through learning to know our neighbors outside the walls of our church, through commitments to act and speak against the violence in our neighborhood, our city and our world. We realize challenges to these efforts – as conflict often accompanies openness to diversity – but we trust that honesty and reliance on the Spirit will keep us humble and united, as we listen to God and each other.

Recognizing Christ as the foundation to all of this, we prioritize deepening relationships with God and prayer, joined with regular study of Scripture together. We envision authentic worship; joyous singing of adults, children and youth alike; sharing each other’s traditional ethnic foods, all in a spacious, welcoming and community-accessible place. We sensed that there would be increasing hope; new faces and voices; deeper discipleship and communion; more holistically Godly living. We believe this to be possible, because of God’s grace, which brings our lives together in Jesus Christ, as we submit ourselves together to the Spirit’s wisdom. We see ourselves on the threshold of much of this.

If you haven’t figured it out yet - this is our vision for mission here at OCMC. By God’s grace it is being birthed right here right now, we, you and I in the midst of being transformed are being positioned to transform our community. We are at the right place at the right time where God’s desires (Kingdom) for this community are intersecting with our own heart’s desire. Amen?
As we transition into the prayer portion I want to re-read a scripture:

Romans 8:22-25 “we know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present....in the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will (your will be done on Earth as in Heaven)

Pray in small groups?

End time with Lord’s prayer.