

## Your Kingdom Come

February 6, 2011

### Scripture: Psalm 24

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- The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it;  
<sup>2</sup> for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.  
<sup>3</sup> Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?  
<sup>4</sup> Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully.  
<sup>5</sup> They will receive blessing from the LORD, and vindication from the God of their salvation.  
<sup>6</sup> Such is the company of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.\*
- <sup>7</sup> Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.  
<sup>8</sup> Who is the King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle.  
<sup>9</sup> Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.  
<sup>10</sup> Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory.

We as a church are praying together for 90 days using a little Prayer book called *Pray Daily*. You will find them in the Narthex near the front doors if you would like one today. Our prayers are shaped by the Lord's Prayer. As we seek to be disciples of Jesus, we are a praying people who grow in faith together by the power of God's Spirit. I have heard some wonderful stories from you of how being attentive to God's work around you by reading of Scripture, taking time to reflect (something that is in short order for many of us) and praying. Last week we began our sermons series on the Lords' Prayer beginning with "Our Father who art in heaven, Howard be thy name." And by the way, if you want to call God Howard, go ahead, but just to be clear God's first name isn't Frank 😊

Today we consider the next part of the prayer, "Your Kingdom Come". When Jesus begins his ministry he proclaims the Kingdom of God coming. Listen to a word for us today about the Kingdom of God.

### Matthew 5:1-12

- 5:1 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.  
5:2 Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:  
5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
5:4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.  
5:5 "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.  
5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.  
5:7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.  
5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.  
5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.  
5:10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
5:11 "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.  
5:12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

## Proclamation of the Word

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The Kingdom of God or according to Matthew's gospel "The Kingdom of Heaven" is here. They mean the same thing....Matthew, being a faithful Jew, simply wants to respect the Lord's Name, the holy name of God, so Matthew refers to the kingdom of heaven mostly. When Jesus speaks of heaven, it is not just an eternal after-life sort of place far off in the sky. In the ancient Jewish world, heaven was considered to be multi-layered. The idea of heaven was three layered. The first heaven was the air where birds fly and as near as our own breath, very close indeed. The second heaven was the vast expanse of the night sky. The third was the spiritual throne room of God Almighty. Heaven is as near as breath and very hidden and vast as the holiness of God. The kingdom is imminent and transcendent.

Psalm 24 shouts out "The earth is the Lord's and all that dwells in it." All of life belongs to the Creator God. God is the King of Heaven and Earth. And those who approach God with clean hands and pure hearts- a metaphor for single-minded devotion to God, may meet God upon the holy hill. They shall be "blessed".

In our second lesson today from Matthew's telling of the Sermon on the Mount, we find Jesus upon a hill side preaching. Jesus is the one whom God has called and anointed to bring Good news. He announces the kingdom of God. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." Is how the Sermon on the Mount begins. Then Jesus enacts the Kingdom after calling some hard-working fishermen to follow him. And who were the members of the First Church of Galilee? They were the sick, the demon possessed, those in pain, epileptics and paralytics. Not the usual suspects at First Church-anytown.

But it came time for Jesus and his patrol leaders and chief advisors, the clearly committed, to go away from the crowds for awhile. They put on their hiking boots and climb up the hill together. Does this remind you of another time in the history of God's people? Moses hiked the mountain to receive the Covenant Law, the 10 Commandments. Jesus is the New Covenant who will fulfill the Law not replace it. Jesus is like Moses, a new Moses. But he is the one who has been anointed to usher in the Kingdom of heaven.

Now I know "Kingdom" sounds archaic. To first century ears, it would conjure up Kingdoms: Babylon, Persian, Egypt, Alexander the Great's Greek Empire, Rome- all temporal kingdoms. For contemporary ears, it might be helpful to think of the Kingdom of God as the Governance of God. And what does the Governance of God look like? Jesus describes it in the Sermon on the Mount, and he begins with pronouncing "Blessedness."

The word "Blessed" is from our Jewish understanding of blessing as God's provision for the fullness of life including knowledge of God and right relationships. Biblical blessing is not victory or success, it is God's provision for the fullness of life. It is recognizing God's presence and purposes, God's desire for all creation to have fullness of Life in relationship with the Creator and with each other. After all, this is the purpose of the law, 10 commandments- living right relationship with God and with neighbor.

These beatitudes, these blessings are words committed to memory, scribbled in prayer journals, and held dear for many generations. They remind us that the Kingdom of God, the governance of God is one of mercy, peace, and food for the hungry. Even if political empires rule by economic and military might, God's governance will be one of wholeness, mercy, and peace.

But these blessings do sound strange. What is blessed about mourning and being poor in spirit? It sounds like Jesus is saying, "Blessed are the unemployed. Blessed are those who are attacked by bombs. Blessed are those who have marital strife." What can be blessed about those situations? Part of the reason for the strangeness is that we live in a world with other values. Think about the message we receive in our world. The Beatitudes put in language that children understand: <http://worshippingwithchildren.blogspot.com/2010/12/year-fourth-sunday-in-epiphany-fourth.html>

It's good for the rich, they can buy whatever they want.

It's good for the strong, they can take whatever they want. They will also make the team.

It's good for the winners, they get all the prizes.

It's good for the smart, they get straight A's, get to go to college, and get good jobs.  
It's good for the beautiful, they will get their pictures in magazines and get to be in movies.  
It's good for the grownups, they get to make all the plans.  
But Jesus says, God's ways are different.

The blessedness of the poor in spirit, the grieving, the merciful, is not a checklist for faithfulness. It is a description, a promise. And what is blessed about these things is that in that place, God is blessing you with sustenance and strength, blessing you with comfort and care, blessing you with a provisional grace. And blessings cannot be sought after or acquired, but must be received as a gift

Blessedness is NOW! It is present/future experience. The Kingdom of God breaks in and will come. These are not if/then statements. If you try to be poor in spirit then you will have the kingdom of heaven. Listen to the promise, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" and "blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." These are not goals of the Christian life, they are givens in the holy governance of God. In those places of mercy, peace, purity of heart, God is there sustaining and upholding us. All heaven breaks loose! God's kingdom comes.

These are such familiar words, so hear them in a fresh way.  
I am reading from the Bible paraphrase, The Message.

#### **Matthew 5 You're Blessed** (from the Message)

<sup>3</sup>"You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. **(Blessed are the poor in spirit)** With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

<sup>4</sup>"You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. **(Blessed are those who mourn)** Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

<sup>5</sup>"You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less **(Blessed are the meek)**. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

<sup>6</sup>"You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. **(Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness)** God's food and drink is the best meal you'll ever eat.

<sup>7</sup>"You're blessed when you care. **(Blessed are the merciful)** At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for.

<sup>8</sup>"You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. **(Blessed are the pure in heart)** Then you can see God in the outside world.

<sup>9</sup>"You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. **(Blessed are the peacemakers)** That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

<sup>10</sup>"You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. **(Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake)** The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

Such is the kingdom of God.

Frederick Beuchner describes the kingdom of God in this way.

*"The Kingdom of God is as close to us as some precious keepsake we have been looking for years which is lying in the room next to us under the rug which is all but crying out for us to come find it. If only we had eyes to see and ears to*

*hear and wits to understand, we would know that the kingdom of God in the sense of holiness, goodness and beauty is as close to breathing and is crying out to be born within us and within the world. We would know that the Kingdom of God is what all of us hunger for even though we don't know its name or even realize that it is what we are starving to death for. The Kingdom of God is where our best dreams come from and our truest prayers. We glimpse at those moments when we find ourselves being better than we are and wiser than we know. We catch sight of it when at some moment of crisis a strength seems to come to us that is greater than our own strength.*

*The Kingdom of God is where we belong. It is home, and whether we realize it or not, I think all of us are homesick for it."*

Most of us are homeless, restless until we find our rest in God.

I think the world could use more blessedness, more heaven. It is natural when someone sneezes for total strangers to turn to us, look us in the eye, and say "Bless you." How nice and refreshing when for a second we take time to share a good word, a benediction of blessing on another person.

My friend Mark, always remembers to say "God Bless" when someone sneezes. I think it is his little way of doing evangelism and sharing the good news. I like that. It reminds us that it is God who blesses, but indeed we might be an instrument of blessing both individually and collectively. So as a way of living out the prayer saying, Your Kingdom Come, maybe we could pronounce more blessings. Maybe we could live out the beatitudes by speaking blessings on each other:

God bless you when you fail the exam

God bless you when your relationships are going great

God bless you when your marriage is crumbling.

God bless you when you have everything you need.

God bless you when you lose your job.

God bless you while you go through Chemo.

God bless you when you are fulfilled in your work and school.

God bless you when you have lost direction.

God bless you when you are happy.

God bless you when you are depressed.

God bless you when you take Scouts camping for the weekend in 20 degree weather.

God bless you when you take God's healing to brothers and sisters in Ghana.

God bless you...God bless us...God bless them, all God's creatures.

May we live as we pray, "Your kingdom come"

And be governed by the grace, mercy and peace of God's Kingdom- our true home.

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<sup>1</sup>Frederick Beuchner, *Secrets in the Dark; A life of Sermons*, (Harper Collins: New York) 2006, p. 149-150