

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, February 5, 2023

Matthew 6:7-15

The title of today's sermon which was put to print on Thursday was The Thing About Forgiveness. Here's the thing about forgiveness. Um, we're not going to talk about that this morning. Actually the spirit's done something else in the last few hours, and so we're going to go in a different direction and imagine together that the spirit might move amongst us in the text in a different way. Forgiveness is a topic of ours that we'll get to the second Sunday in Lent, and so we'll, we'll save that message for then. We will however listen to the words that Jesus gives to the disciples when there is inquiry on how it is they ought to pray. But before we do that, I'm just going to invite you to take a deep breath in with me and breathe it out slowly. Take one more deep breath in. Breathe it out slowly.

The words of our savior from Matthew, Chapter 6.

‘When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

‘Pray then in this way:
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of Our Lord endures forever. Amen.

‘Your kingdom come, your will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven.’

We pray this phrase every week. Every week our children lead us in it. It is the way that we close out every one of our times with the younger church. It is the younger church that speaks to us a truth that calls us to, in unison voice, ask for something that I seldom imagine we can comprehend. I wonder each time we pray this prayer, “Do we know what we are asking for?”

‘Your kingdom come, your will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven.’ When Presbyterians talk about the kingdom of God, we are talking about a reality that has multiple dimensions to it. The phrase that is often used to describe the kingdom of God in many theological circles is “is the

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, February 5, 2023

already and the not yet.” Maybe you've heard that phrase. That means that there is a dimension of the kingdom of God that has already broken into the world, ushered in by Jesus the Christ. As Jesus says in the Gospel of Mark, “The kingdom of God has come near.”

But there is also a dimension of the kingdom of God that has not yet been realized. As Jesus says to one of the men beside him on Calvary, “Today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Speaking about and understanding the kingdom of God in this way with multiple dimensions is important for us. It is reassuring to know that our journey has indeed a destination, a kingdom where the prophet Isaiah tells us “swords will be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks.”

But if we only understand the kingdom of God as the hereafter, then we might grow content with the way things are.

We might lose the fire that the spirit has enlivened us with. That’s why it's empowering for us to also know that the kingdom is also breaking into the world here and now, drawing close, as Jesus tells the disciples.

About five years ago I had fallen out of a regular prayer practice. Fallen out. It’s kind of my way of softening the idea that I never really had one. We’ll just pretend. Y’all don't know me more than two years ago, so we'll pretend like I had a strong prayer life before that; but I just didn't have regular prayer as part of my daily regimen of what it looked like to be a follower of Jesus Christ. And I had a mentor at that time, someone who had been a pastor for a long time; and he said, “Well, why don't you just start praying the way that Jesus taught his disciples to pray. Like me, just pray that— every morning.” He said, “You could even do what I do, actually, if you want to. “I pray it every morning,” he said, “and I, I move my entire body. I move up and down based on the prayer itself ‘Our Father Who Art in Heaven,’ and I raise my hands towards the heavens, and I stretch really high.”

“May your name be revered as holy. As scripture tells us here. ‘Your kingdom come,’ and I raise my hands, bring them down and bring them to the ground. ‘Your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.’” And he said, “You can just start that practice if you want to. You can just start doing it, and maybe that'll become a regular practice for you.” And it did. It’s simple. I knew the words. I appreciated the movement. A few months into this practice I said to him, “This has really been meaningful to me. I'm really appreciative.” He said. “What do you think about when you're praying?” “Uh, not much actually.” He said, “You’re doing a whole lot when you are praying The Lord's Prayer, more than you might imagine,” he said. “I was just last week across the pond, and I realized as I bent down and I prayed ‘your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven,’ I pressed my hands a little harder against the ground; and I realized that what I was asking for in that moment was for God's kingdom to break in right where my hands were, right in that place. ‘Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.’ Wherever you are, David, wherever you are, every time you pray that prayer, no matter where you are, when you bend down and you place your hands upon the ground, you are asking that

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, February 5, 2023

God might bring that kingdom to the dirt right under your feet, in the dirt right here and right now. Meaning, David, that you don't die to get into heaven; you live yourself into it.”

He said, “We are extended this awesome opportunity to be builders of the kingdom of God, because the kingdom is happening right here and right now in the dirt, meaning in this world. The dirt on which you stand belongs to God, and if it belongs to God, then it does not belong to any other power. There is only one maker of heaven and Earth.”

There are times, beloved, when it is not difficult to imagine that the dirt under our feet, that the community in which we find ourselves belongs to God. There are times of deep and abiding joy that we get to experience together, times when we will join our voices in song giving great thanks to God. And then there are times like we have experienced over the last few weeks.

The last few weeks have laid bare the truth that the kingdom, that there is a dimension of this kingdom that has not yet been established. There is an already, we believe, but there is a heavy not yet. Our city and community, we've had to reckon with the reality of this truth in the wake of Tyree Nichols murder. In these times we might question whether the kingdom is inbreaking at all, whether God's power is enough to shift the systems and protect God's children. We might wonder if God is indeed coming into the world afresh and anew.

I was reminded this week of a donut date that I went on about four years ago. One of my dearest friends lives in Dallas, Texas. He has a little daughter named Olivia. Olivia did her young schooling at Temple Emanuel, so she would go six days a week, enjoy time there. When I went to visit, I would get to be a part of the ride to school. We stopped and got a donut right across from the school, and we got in the car, and Olivia said to Tikkun Alam, “Dad, let's play Tikkun Alam.”

And so my buddy pressed play, and this song came on the radio or over the speakers. excuse me' and she began to sing every word in Hebrew. That's one thing that you get when your child goes to Temple for school.

I didn't actually understand all the words. I wasn't very good at language in seminary, but she knew them perfectly. And so her little voice just filled up that 2007 Honda Accord, and she just kept singing that one phrase to Tikkun Alam, to Tikkun Alam over and over and over again, and we dropped her off, and she went to school just skipping her way into Temple, and I looked over at my buddy, and I said, “Okay, I know I'm supposed to know this, but what does that mean?”

He said, “Um, yeah, it's, it's an old Jewish phrase. It's actually kind of foundational to how Jewish people understand their faith in God. Tikkun Alam. It, it refers to being a repairer of the world, or other rabbis might say a repairer of the breach.”

He said, “The song is actually this song of encouragement, of what it looks like to follow in the ways of God. It's really a charge, Tikkun Alam. You, oh, people, are to be repairers of the breach.”

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, February 5, 2023

He said, "I actually didn't know it until um just a few weeks ago. Perhaps you all remember October 27th of 2018. 11 worshipers including a 97-year-old woman were gunned down at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

During one of the memorial services for those worshipers, this one in Brentwood, California, actually all the way across the country, a rabbi stood at a Presbyterian Church's pulpit and said, "Tikkun Alam, we are to be repairers of the breach. And once you know that you are a repairer of the breach, an ambassador of the Living God, then you can't help but do the work of repair."

I was glad I was reminded of that short car ride this week, because when we are faced with the reality of the not yetness of the kingdom of God, it can feel like we have nothing to do, nothing good to add; but there is so much. McLaren forms it this way, "For those who follow in the ways of Christ, Jesus forms a movement of people who trust him and believe his message, they believe that they don't have to wait for this or that to happen, but rather that they can begin living in a new and better way now, a way of life Jesus conveyed by the pregnant phrase— kingdom of God. Life for them now is about an interactive relationship reconciled to God, reconciled to one another; and so they see their entire lives as an opportunity to make the beautiful music of God's kingdom so that more and more people will be drawn into it, and so that the world will be changed are there growing together into it as well."

I was reminded this week of the voice of a little girl in the backseat of a Honda. Not just happy-go-lucky on her way to school but truly understanding what it means to be reflections of the Living God in the world. We were put on this Earth to repair the Earth, to repair relationships, to restore everyone to God and one another. Once we know that, we can't help but get about the work of that repair.

'Your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.' This morning I wonder again. I wonder, "Do we know what we are asking for? Do we know the depth and breadth of that prayer? Do we understand our calling to inaugurate the kingdom through our prayer and our presence, our power and our privilege, our advocacy and our action?"

When Christ encourages the disciples to model this prayer, he knows what he is doing.

He is instilling within them a belief that the world should be different because they are in it, that the communities in which they reside should be different because they are in them. Beloved, because we have gathered for worship today because we have been here, the world should be different when we leave.

As Presbyterians, we believe that the kingdom of God is already and not yet. That not yet-ness is on full display for us in our city, and yet we are called to be those who work for the reconciling of the world, to repair the breach. So, here's our call today—to recognize and observe, to mourn and grieve the brokenness, and then to work, to be about the work of repairing, to be about the work of mending, to be about the work of dismantling, so that God might author something

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, February 5, 2023

brand new. It's the promise of the Gospel. That's what we ask for when we pray 'thy kingdom come, thy will be done.'

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, Mother of us all. Amen.