

“YOUR KINGDOM COME” LORD’S PRAYER 3

Pastor Michael Jarick

Ladies, how would you like to be queen for a day? Gentlemen, you’d be allowed to be king! Think about it. It would be tempting, wouldn’t it? In the last Ashes cricket test, the sun would have come out on days 4 and 5, the Aussies racked up a 250-run lead, then demolished the English batsmen for a one run victory. House prices would be affordable, and the waiting list for public housing would be weeks, rather than years. Yet there would still be a healthy return for investors and those living on their super.

Just think of the improvements you could make. I’d get a nice tax return. Better still, I wouldn’t have to pay tax! We could raise the public profile of St John’s and employ a Mission Director. We could pass a law that made people go to church. We could stop the persecution of Christians in China, the Middle East, and parts of Africa. If only I was king, even if it were just for a day!

In 1st Timothy 6:15, Jesus is described as “the blessed and only ruler, the King of kings and Lord of Lords.” If Jesus is king, then what do you see when you look around his kingdom?

It’s tempting to say that it’s not much of a kingdom, is it? – the church in decline in Western countries, both in terms of numbers of followers and in the authority and influence. When we see the church’s name in a headline on the TV or in the newspaper, we are likely to expect news of a scandal or a failure.

Not much of a kingdom! Christians have lived continuously and been a strong presence in Mosul, Northern Iraq since New Testament times. When ISIS overran the city in 2014, the 30 000 Christians had the choice of converting to Islam, leaving with the clothes on their back, or staying and facing the sword or a gun. After ISIS was defeated, how many Christians returned to the city? About 40.

If Jesus is the King of kings, then where is the majesty? Where is the unquestioned authority? Where is the justice being meted out, and the enemies being ground into the dust? We might find ourselves casually wondering whether we wouldn’t do a better job of running the show.

Yet with few exceptions, this is the way God’s kingdom has always been. The image that Jesus uses for the kingdom in the Gospel is so low that it’s subterranean. In the Gospel for today, God’s kingdom starts out as small as a mustard seed.

In the Parable of the Seed Growing in Mark 4, the farmer sows the seed and then goes about his life. The farmer can’t make the seed grow. It happens whether he is awake or asleep. He doesn’t even understand how it happens. All by itself, or so it seems, the seed puts out roots, then grows a shoot, then a stalk, then produces a crop.

When Jesus told this parable to his disciples, I think they would have been mystified. Once when a Samaritan village rejected Jesus, James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven to incinerate the village. They weren't called the "sons of thunder" for nothing.

Peter once sliced off the ear of the servant of the high priest in the Garden of Gethsemane when soldiers came to arrest Jesus. I don't think he was attempting cosmetic surgery at the time. For the disciples, the kingdom meant the restoration of the glory at the time of King David and Solomon, when Israel was a powerful and prosperous nation. God was in his temple, and people came from across the ancient world to worship him.

But the signs were always there, weren't they? Who came to welcome the birth of the Messiah? True, wise men from the East arrived with their splendid gifts at some later stage, but on the night it was a bunch of shepherds!

Then the Messiah grows up in the backblocks of Galilee, learning carpentry. Then he gathers around him a group of fishermen, a tax collector, and various sinners. It was an odd way, to say the least, for a king to establish his kingdom. And what about his message? "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." And then the most ridiculous of all: "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing."

It's true that along the way there were signs that God's kingdom was coming. Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah in chapter 61 by proclaiming good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom for the oppressed. But most of the time, the kingdom came quietly, like a seed under the earth germinating and growing.

I wonder how different we are from Jesus' disciples? Why does God allow his name to be despised or ignored? How many times a day does someone use God's name as an exclamation of surprise or disgust? Why isn't his kingdom dazzling and brilliant for all the world to see? Why is his kingdom hidden?

Nor are we that different from the farmer in the parable, in my opinion. This morning we have sown the seed, and God's kingdom is sprouting and growing. We go to sleep, and we wake up and go to work. We don't understand how it happens, but God's kingdom is growing.

When a baby is baptized, the baby doesn't comprehend what is going on. I don't understand how God can use something as ordinary as water from the tap to bring a person into his kingdom. But the water is accompanied by God's promises in his word, so it is living water. God's kingdom is hidden under three splashes of water and a few words spoken over a little baby in a modest church.

God's kingdom comes indeed without our praying for it, but we ask in this prayer that it may come also to us. When does this happen? God's kingdom comes when our Heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy word and live a godly life on earth now and in heaven forever.

Here's a story to finish: Johnny was a very bright 5 year old. One day he told his dad that he would like to have a brother to play with. He offered to do whatever he could to

help. His dad thought for a while, and then said, "I'll tell you what, Johnny! If you pray every day for 2 months for a baby brother, I reckon that God will give you one!" Johnny thought that was a great idea. He went to bed early that night so that he could start praying.

Every night for two months he prayed. But then he started to have doubts. He asked his friends, and none of them had ever heard of getting a baby brother this way, so he stopped praying.

One day his mother went to hospital. When she returned home, Johnny's parents called him into the bedroom. Johnny entered cautiously, not knowing what to expect. His mother was sitting up in bed, looking a little tired. Then he saw a little bundle that his mother was holding. His father pulled back the blanket, and there he was – his new baby brother! How fantastic!

Then his father pulled back the blanket a little more, and there was another baby brother! Twins! His dad turned to Johnny and said, "Now, aren't you glad that you prayed every night for 2 months?" Little Johnny thought for a while and then replied, "Yes dad, and aren't you glad that I stopped praying when I did!" Amen.