

A communion meditation delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Easter Sunday, April 24, 2011, dedicated to Mark Williams, our resurrection story this year, and always to the glory of God!

**“The Kingdom, and the Power
and the Glory are Yours
Forever. Amen.”**

**Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 28:1-11
(Final sermon in the series
“The Lord’s Prayer”)**

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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In a letter written shortly before his death, Thomas Carlyle described how during a sleepless night, he had meditated on the Lord’s Prayer phrase by phrase. He wrote, *“I discovered at every point that I was carried out beyond my depth.”*

This could easily describe the experience of most of us in praying the prayer our Savior has given. As we break it down phrase by phrase, we discover the true depth of its meaning. From the “Our Father,” to the holiness of God, to the coming of God’s kingdom on earth as in heaven, to God’s will being done, to receiving bread for our daily journey, to forgiving and being forgiven, to being led out of temptation’s path and being delivered from evil, each petition carries us beyond “our little space and time”

into the eternal realm of God. Thomas Carlyle's words come to life as we are drawn into final doxology of praise: **"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen."**

On this Easter Sunday as our risen savior blows open the doors to eternity in his rising from death to life, we have ascended a mountaintop of praise to God for God's kingdom, power and glory as it comes to life in new ways.

We have just passed through the season in which our savior journeyed through the wilderness - overcoming the Evil One's tempting offers to rule all the kingdoms of the earth, to have power equal to God and the glory beyond imagination. Jesus rejected each of these temptations from the Evil One on the grounds that God alone reigns over heaven and earth and fully knowing kingdoms, power and glory are not for anyone (including the Evil One) to sell or give away or for anyone else to receive!

We come even closer to this doxology in King David's farewell prayer found in I Chronicles 29:11. David prays: *"Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory and the majesty. . . . Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above it."* Our New Testament trinity of praise echoes this classic ascription from David's lips.

"Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory of God" is not a phrase found in the prayer that Jesus gave his disciples. It cannot be found in Luke's version, or in the earliest manuscripts of Matthew. Modern translations do not include it, mentioning it only in footnotes. We first see it in the Didache written around 100 A.D. The Didache was an early manual of Christian teaching composed of 16 short chapters and less than 3,000 words. To the early church fathers and mothers, it was the second most important book outside of the Bible.

Purists and literalists will say this phrase should not be in the prayer because it did not appear in the Gospels. I believe, the fact that this phrase first appears in the Didache and then is joined to

the rest of the prayer for the past 1,900 years strengthens the prayer.

Imagine your Christian brothers and sisters in the 2nd century struggling under the sword of the Roman Empire. They are meeting in homes, in caves, in the catacombs of the dead. They worship in hiding for fear of being killed.

Go back in time. The church of Jesus Christ is several generations old. It has been 70 years since the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These have become increasingly remote stories for the believers. Removed 1,970 years, I hear from some of you who feel similarly. Thinking back, for Christians in the year 100 A.D., Jesus' death and resurrection would have felt as Pearl Harbor feels to my children and me. It is a story I have heard from parents and read about in history books. It is not vivid. It is not close to my reality. Closer to home, imagine how every child 10 and younger feels when we mention 9/11. They must think we are talking in codified language - although it seems like yesterday to us. Seventy years distance from something is a long time.

Now, Jesus' prayer - passed down through the texts and the generations -is given new life. God's kingdom, power and glory are here and they are coming! God is the ruler yet! God is real and God's real presence embodies hope.

Eighty years ago, Dr. L. P. Jacks wrote a little book that Dr. Morgan Noyes quoted in one sermon on the Lord's Prayer from this pulpit in 1959. Addressing people beset by difficulties in life, Dr. Jacks wrote,

We are too apt to rest in the thought that to follow Christ is merely to follow a teacher, a reformer, so that enough has been done when we have repeated his doctrine of (God's love and human kindness), voted for his precepts, and practiced as much of them as we can or as much as we find convenient. . . . But, to follow Christ is to follow a victor in life's battles, a conqueror over suffering and death, through the completeness of his loyalty to our Great Companion - (even God his father).

Someone else said the result of Christ's resurrection was not a committee with an executive, but a fellowship with an experience. It is in the glory of the resurrected Christ that the kingdom, power and glory of our God become real! In raising Christ from death, God overcomes the principalities and powers of this world. In raising Christ from death, God demonstrates his power and glory for all time to come - and beyond time as well.

However, the triumphant nature of these words, spoken safely in a high pulpit in Columbus, Ohio, is tempered this day. They feel so much removed from the hills and desert mountains in which Jesus rose from the dead. Our sisters and brothers there, the small number of Palestinian Christians numbering only 175,000, are in my heart and mind. Did you know, we have more United Church of Christ folks in Ohio than there Palestinian Christians in the land of Jesus. Their numbers are weak and shrinking. Because of laws within Israel that keep them separated from one another, they face daily hardship and oppression. They are mostly poor and often feel forsaken and forgotten. But make no mistake about it - they are AN EASTER PEOPLE! Over many of the doors of Christians in the Holy Land is St. George slaying the dragon. They are strong in the face of so much hardship.

Last Easter, faced with a growing sense of isolation and disconnection from the other 2.1 billion Christians worldwide, Christian leaders in the Land of the Holy One sent an Easter letter to all the rest of us. Amid our trumpet blasts and joyous "alleluias", most of us did not hear their cry. The patriarchs, archbishops and bishops, pastors and priests wrote to us:

(Daily we face hardship) We, know the power of despair. We know the power of evil. We know the power of the 'principalities and powers' of this world, which promote agendas of division and oppression to bring harm to God's people throughout God's creation. We, with you, know the power of sin and death.

We also know the power of the Resurrection. We know the power of God to bring hope out of despair. We know the power of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior, to use forgiveness and love to

conquer evil. We know the power of God in Christ to confront those same 'principalities and powers' to promote faith, mutual respect, compassion and courage to speak the truth to benefit all of God's people. We know the power of the forgiveness of sins to redeem relationships in families and among the family of nations. We know the power of the gift of eternal life for all who believe.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen. He is Risen Indeed. Alleluia!

Like our 1st century brothers and sisters in Christ, the Christians in the Holy Land are intimately connected to the days of crucifixion and resurrection. They know that kingdoms and the power and glory belong NOT to earthly rulers, but to God almighty. The Palestinian Christians are a Resurrection People! Their worship, their churches, their children, their joyful spirit sing of faith, hope and love. And when they pray the Lord's Prayer, it is with determination and the sober realism of life lived for Christ in his land, in his path. May we follow their model of passionate faith lived in the light, life, and love of the risen Christ.

A beloved colleague of mine likes to say, "Our greatest days are today and tomorrow." How will we live Christ's prayer in the resurrection joy of our greatest days - today and tomorrow?

It is my hope and prayer you live fully into God's promise found in the Lord's Prayer. Live into God's holiness, into God's will, receiving the gift of life God offers in daily bread, forgiveness of sins and through which he leads us out of temptation and away from the Evil One.

If we are bold to speak the prayer Christ has given us, may we also be bold as we live into the fullness of God's kingdom, power, and glory promised here as well. God bless and keep you strong in the faith of our resurrected Lord - today and tomorrow. Amen.