

**“Thy Will be Done, on Earth
as it is in Heaven”**

Matthew 6 and Luke 11, Lent 3C

**Part IV of VIII in the Lenten sermon series,
“The Lord’s Prayer”**

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From the Pulpit

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A few words can really change the meaning of things.

I have been known to misquote song lyrics. My friends laugh and will tell you that I misquote them a lot.

Here are a few comma ones you may know:

Elton John’s hit: Hold me closer, Tony Danza!

The 1972 hit by Johnny Nash: I can see clearly now, Lorraine is gone!

The 5th Dimension’s 1969 hit: Aquarius/Let the Sunshine In... This is the dawning of the age of asparagus. The age of asparagus....

I have been known to replace the pronouns from time to time when I sing the best churchy hymns---

”Great is My Faithfulness” instead of Great is THY Faithfulness”

Some other good ones I’ve heard of:

“While Shepherds washed their socks by night”

“We three kings of porridge and tar.”

Just a few letters off can really change the meaning.

So a quick search found a few follies that are applicable to the theme on the Lord’s Prayer.

Our Father, Who does art in Heaven,

Hollywood be your name.

Thy kingdom come,

My will be done, I heard it is in heaven.

Forgive us our trash passes, as we forgive those who passed trash against us

Lead us not into Penn Station

But deliver us from E-mail.

For mine is the kingdom, and the flower and the jewelry, forever.

Amen.

A change in a few words can really change things.

For today, we continue on in our series on the Lord's Prayer: Thy Will Be Done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Today we come to what may be thought of as the third petition centered on God.

Thy Will be Done on Earth as it is in heaven.

We could look at it as a hinge in the prayer. Today's focus remains on God and the earthly places for God to be at work. After this, the prayer shifts to the petitions for the people. The remainder of the Lord's Prayer seem to center in human needs for food, forgiveness, defense against temptation and deliverance from evil. Jesus wove all these longings of the heart together for this prayer.

Two parts:

1. Thy Will be Done

I want to be clear that I do not profess to know the will of God. I'll stop far short of any sort of assertion on that. What is God's and what is mine. However, we are talking about the amazing resilience of God's purposes. God's intent for the world is not stumped by our plans. God's will *will* be done on earth as it is in heaven.

It was Saint Augustine who said that our lives are like a chicken yard full of random tracks, chicken tracks in the mud, going this way and that in confusion. Seen through the eyes of faith, straining to see the purposes of God, our lives take on pattern, coherence, form; we discover certain design, a direction as if led by some unseen hand. Then we know from the writings of Paul, that *“all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose.”* (Romans 8:28).

When we pray Thy Will be Done... “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” it may sound at first as if we are urging you to do something – bend your rebellious will to God's will, get busy doing here on earth that God is doing in heaven.

While that may be implied – certainly we ought to act in accordance with what is real, and in this prayer, we are saying what is real, namely, the will of the living God – that is not the first thing to be said. “Your will be done, on earth as in heaven” is first a declaration of what God is doing before it implies anything that we ought to do.

When Martin Luther translated the Bible into German the phrase was, “Your will appear, as in heaven, so on earth.” Here the earnest

longing for God's will to appear in all fullness before us, for God's dealings with the world to appear in convincing clarity and power.

Perhaps, one reason why we gather on Sunday and tell stories, pray, and sing is so that we might better perceive what is really going on in the world, namely, that God is taking on the sins of the world, and meaning it for good.

To pray, "Your Will be done" we are not asking that things come out right as we want things to come out, but rather to have our lives caught up in some project greater than our lives, namely, of what God is doing in the world.

Too often we are conditioned to think of prayer as asking God for what we want, Dear God, give me this, give me that. But now, in praying that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven, we are attempting to school ourselves to want what God wants. We receive, not what our hearts desire, but rather we become so enthralled with a vision of what God is doing on earth and in heaven, that we forget the story that the world has told us – that we have nothing better to do than to satisfy our desires.

In praying, we are being thrust into the world, for there is nowhere else that we will be able to see God's will appearing other than in the world.

You may have an image in mind of what the world would look like – a glimpse of the Kingdom (heavenly space).

Scripture helps us:

The wolf will live with the lamb.

And the leopard will lie down with the young goat

The calf and the young lion will feed together

And a little child shall lead them.

(Isaiah 11: 6-9)

They shall beat their swords into ploughshares,

and their spears into pruning-hooks;

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,

neither shall they learn war anymore;

(Micha 4:3; Isaiah 2: 4-5)

2. On Earth As it is in Heaven....

The other portion of this petition this morning is “On Earth as it is in Heaven.” Each time we offer this petition, we ask God for our planet to become what God intended for it to be. This is not just a personal and private vision. It is a vision for the world, and for caretakers to care for all of God’s creation.

We are inviting God to give us a vision for the world as it should be – and then not only in prayer but also to work to help that vision become a reality.

In the way we live our lives and work for good in our communities and world, we are trying to close the space between the world that is – and what the world could be as the vision God intends.

Where does the world as it is not align with the world as it should be? This is the question that extends this phrase of the Lord’s prayer to a larger cosmic scale.

- Racism and racial injustice:
- Global warming and environmental concerns
- Poverty and food insecurity

This is part of the prayer we pray: 'Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done!

- Every public policy decision
- Every social issue
- Every place where humans suffer

Thy will be done.... ON EARTH as it is in heaven.

How can we look upon the news of the day, and not believe that we are far from what God intends for the world and human relationships?

- The famine in Ethiopia
- The fresh images of war in Ukraine
- The power of the helpers like World Central Kitchen
- The power of those in prayer.

One of the images for me, prior to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine, was of people gathered in the Ukrainian city parks kneeling two by two, in prayer – a picture emblazoned in my memory of people gathered to pray for peace, for a better way – for the world to not be as we intend it but that which God visions.

When the little girl not yet five lays her head down on her pillow, her mother invites her to join in nightly prayer. The little girl begins, Our Father...who art in heaven.....hallowed be thy name. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Much to the mother's surprise, her youngest has the words in her heart. Her mother doesn't remember teaching it to her specifically, but that saying the corporate prayer out loud – together, every week at church, has begun to imprint this prayer in her growing library.

It's good to have the Lord's Prayer as part of our DNA, in whatever language you want to use with whatever version is familiar to your heart. It's a reminder of the power of the things we repeatedly do.

On Sundays when I lead this gathered community in prayer....there is always this pause, where I begin "Our Father..." and my heart pauses....knowing and trusting that you all will join with me... but just for a moment – there is a pause – I think it's because I know I don't want to say this prayer without you..

The prayer we lift is magnified when we say them together.

When we pray

Thy will be done –

we offer very our lives to God, and turn over the control that pervades our lives to God.

On Earth as it is in Heaven,

we offer – to help make this world the vision God has for it, even if we are stubborn and slow to catch a glimpse of it.

Your Kingdom Come, Your will be done, here on earth.

When we pray like that we are driven from our knees in prayer, back to our feet to and out into the streets as agents of God's work to help fulfill that vision.

Eugene Peterson's *The Message* offers it this way.

Our Father in heaven,

Reveal who you are.

Set the world right;

Do what's best —

as above, so below.

May it be so.