

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

Isaiah 65:17-25, Acts 10:34-43; Luke 24:1-12

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

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From the Pulpit

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A communion meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Senior Minister, First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Easter Sunday, April 17, 2022, dedicated to the staff of First Church who put our congregation on their shoulders and carried us through the past two years - Amy Wagner, Pat Patterson, Annette McCormick, Mark Dahnke, Darrell Cross, Melissa Kulwicki, Emily Corzine, Mark Williams and Kevin Jones, to all their families and to all our volunteers, choristers, newborns, children, teens, parents, all members and friends of First Church who have held together through the pandemic and always to the glory of God!

**“The Kingdom, The Power and The Glory are Yours
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Part VIII of VIII in the Lenten sermon series, “The Lord’s Prayer”

As we step into the last of eight sermons on “The Lord’s Prayer,” I ask us to remember, once again, that The Lord’s Prayer is a summary of what matters most to Jesus. When we pray this prayer, we are praying what he was passionate about. And because we believe that Jesus is the decisive Revelation of God’s passion, we are praying for what God is passionate about. We are praying for God’s dream of the world. Let’s step into the final phrase, “the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory are yours forever....”

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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, Scottish philosopher, Thomas Carlyle, described how, during a sleepless night, he meditated on the Lord's Prayer phrase by phrase. He wrote, "I discovered that at every point that I was carried out beyond my depth."

This could easily describe the experience for most of us in praying The Lord's Prayer. 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 it is in heaven, to God's will being done, to receiving bread for our daily journey, to receiving God's forgiveness and, in turn, forgiving ourselves, forgiving others, to being led out of temptation's path while being delivered from the pathway of evil, each petition carries us beyond "our depth" into the very 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, forever. Amen."

This Easter Sunday – as our Risen Savior rolls back the boulders in our lives (and we have had a lot of boulders in our lives in recent years) and opens the way to eternal life through 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 a season in which our Savior fasted for 40 days in the wilderness – overcoming the Evil One’s tempting offers to rule the kingdoms of the earth, to have all the power equal to God and to control glory beyond imagination. The devil had a plan for Jesus, and it was to give him the kingdoms, the power and the glory, and Jesus rejects each of these temptations and says it is God alone who reigns over heaven and earth, and it is God’s kingdom, and God’s power and God’s glory. It’s not for sale. The Business offers of the Devil will never be the Enterprise of God.

Let’s look at this phrase: “Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory of God.” Actually, it comes from outside of scripture. Although this prayer echoes King David’s farewell prayer in I Chronicles 29:11, “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,” Jesus doesn’t quote David here. It is not found in Luke’s Gospel or in the earliest manuscripts of Matthew. Modern translations do not include it – though you may read about it in Biblical footnotes.

We first see the phrase in the Didache written around 100 A.D. I have mentioned the Didache during this series a few times. The Didache was an early manual of Christian teaching composed of 16 short chapters and less than 3,000 words. To the early church mothers and fathers, it was the second most important book outside of the Bible. There are Biblical literalists who will say this phrase should not be in the prayer because it did not appear in the Gospels. I think they are wrong. I believe in fact this phrase should be in the prayer because it was important to the people of the first church who found they had to wrap this up, that Jesus had given them all they needed in the life of faith following him, but it was missing in the prayer.

Let's step back in time. Imagine your Christian brothers and sisters in the early 2nd century struggling under the rule of the Rome. They are meeting in homes, in caves, in the catacombs of the dead. The reason they worship there is none of the Romans who worship all their gods are going down in the land of the dead. So, the Christians are safe there knowing that we rise from the dead. They worship in hiding for fear of being killed. The church of Jesus Christ is only a few generations old at this time. It has been 70 years since the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They have become increasingly separated from the stories of the believers that first came to them.

Thinking back, for Christians in the year 100 A.D., Jesus' death and resurrection would have felt like Pearl Harbor feels to me and even more to my children and grandchildren. It is a story I heard from my parents and read about in history books – and now watch on the History Channel. But it's not my story, it is not vivid to me. Similarly, if you start talking about Elvis as “the King” my children might ask if he is married to Beyonce.

Seventy years distance from anything is a long time. Now, Jesus' prayer - passed down through the texts and the generations – is given new life by this final phrase – “God's kingdom, power and glory are here, and they are coming!” Future hope becomes a present reality. It is in the glory of the resurrected Christ that the kingdom, power, and glory of God becomes real! In raising Christ from death, God overcomes the principalities and powers of this world. In raising Christ from death, God demonstrates God's power and glory for all time – and beyond time!

No matter the triumphant nature of these words, spoken safely from this high pulpit in Columbus, Ohio, the truth is – Christ IS Rising right now – in places and among people who have suffered greatly. In spite of everything, still, they rise!

We know a lot about rising. In our own lives and in the lives of our loved ones these past several years, we have had to overcome a lot to rise! In spite of everything we have faced, we have risen!

Across the globe, our sisters and brothers in Christ are lifting up the Risen Christ even as they are being torn down by tyrants and terrorists. In Ukraine this morning, our sisters and brothers in Christ are fighting for their lives and their homeland against Evil embodied by Putin and his oligarchs and the Russian military onslaught which is mass murdering innocent civilians. Still, they rise!

Across our country this morning, we have sisters and brothers in Christ whose churches have burned down from arsonists and wildfires; been blown down by tornados, washed away by hurricanes, and decimated by death from COVID. Undaunted by what could have knocked them all out – still, they rise!

Closer to home, we, as part of BREAD, are working to address environmental injustice, the need for affordable housing, turning around the increased violence in our city and supporting new Americans in our region. We do this together with 44 other Jewish and Christian congregations. We will stand together on May 10th and I invite everyone here to join us that night. It will be a night of rising! Together we will rise!

As Ohioans, we have our own battles to contend with six blocks away from here at the Ohio Statehouse. There, legislators want to abolish

language, laws, education and training related to racial discrimination and systemic racism. Called House Bill 327, it will do many things – including banning books and teaching methodologies around race and ending analysis and care for poor and minority communities in Ohio which address racial discrepancies in health care. According to Jesus, if we are silent, even the rocks will cry out! Let's not be silent. Together, we will rise!

Then, there is House Bill 616. This Bill – commonly referred to as “Don't Say Gay,” will undo 60 years of progress in LGBTQ+ rights in Ohio. When one of our members wrote to one of the Bill Sponsors about his concerns, the supposed legislative leader mocked our member and put him down for asking questions and raising concerns. So not only have we reached new lows in legislative bills, but we have matched these lows with legislative behavior that stoops even lower.

If we ever have hopes of attracting great, progressive, forward-thinking businesses and people to Ohio – we can't allow legislation which is backward even by pre-Civil War standards. We have to turn this around. We can do better, and we must rise. Together, we will rise and stop the madness.

You can tear people down with bombs and bullets and bills – but still we rise! We don't lay down and die, we rise because we follow a savior who calls us to rise.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus is teaching us to pray. He's giving us everything he has to live in right relationships. When we end the prayer acknowledging and celebrating that “the kingdom, the power and the glory” all belong to God, we set ourselves on the right path to right relationships with Jesus, with God and with one another.

Thomas Carlyle was right. The Lord's Prayer carries us "out beyond our depth." This Easter, it is my hope and my prayer that each of us is carried out beyond our depth as we live fully into God's promise found in the Lord's Prayer. Live into God's holiness. Live into God's will for your life. Receive and share the gift of life God offers in daily bread. Receive God's forgiveness and offer it to yourself and to others. Endure and thrive in the midst of temptation's way of tripping you and be delivered out of the grasp of the Evil One. And then, if we are bold enough 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.

My friends, "our greatest days are today and tomorrow." How will our Lord's Prayer in the resurrection joy guide our greatest days – today and tomorrow? I pray that this prayer will move us out beyond our depth.

May God bless and keep you strong in the faith of our resurrected Lord – today and tomorrow. And may the prayer which Jesus rose to sanctify us with forever – be our guide and strength today and all our tomorrows. Amen.

