



8 PENTECOST

AUGUST 2/3, 2014

ISAIAH 55:1-183; LUKE 15:11-32; LUKE 13:18-19

*Seeds of Faith*

FIRST, MARSHALL

PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

*Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

***Everyone take out your red hymnal, and open to page 1163 – there you will find Luther’s Small Catechism – specifically the part on the Lord’s Prayer***

Last week, Pr. Julie preached on the opening of the Lord’s Prayer: ***Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...***

Today our focus will be on the next parts of the prayer:

*Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...*

In these petitions, we’re asking for two things that have incredible, remarkable, eternal implications FOR US and for the world in which we live. So on one level, these requests are **huge**: macro, not micro; cosmic, not atomic; universal, not provincial. Yet, as we’ll soon see, they’re **also**, at the very **same** time, alarmingly, unnervingly, uncomfortably near and dear...to our hearts! So the first question to ask is: what, exactly, are we **asking for** when we pray:

*Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...*

There are many ways we could approach this challenge, but it’s probably best to just pick the two main ideas and simply ask:

1. What is God’s kingdom?
2. What is God’s will?

**Anyone want to take a stab at answering one or both of those questions?**

The **easy** answer to the **first** question is this: **God’s Kingdom** is wherever the **Lord** is...*where all God’s children got a place in the choir...* Think of all the interest about the kingdom of heaven in books and movies today. Four of the most popular have been:

Heaven Is for Real  
Heaven  
The Five People You Meet in Heaven  
90 Minutes in Heaven...

We have a pretty clear...*guess* of what the kingdom of heaven might be like...*after death*. Sure, everyone has their own take on the specifics, but there seems to be a universal agreement that certain things will – or *won't* – happen inside those *pearly gates*.

One website dedicated to this subject asserts that in the kingdom, there will be no more sin, pain, suffering, death, tears, persecution or hunger... And that's something I think we'd **all** pretty much *hope for* and *agree* on: *that the kingdom of heaven means an **end** to **all** that is **bad** about **life** and that **separates** us from **God**.*

This is straight from chapter 21 of the Book of Revelation. A loud voice from the throne is heard to say, *See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and **God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more*** (Rev. 21:3-4). **Can I get an AMEN???**

And **here's** the **easy** answer to the **second** question, "*What is God's will for life?*" Do you remember the story of the time when Jesus was asked to name the most important commandment? **And do you remember his answer?** Here it is from the Gospel of Mark 12:28-31.

<sup>28</sup>*One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that (Jesus) answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?"* <sup>29</sup>*Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one;'* <sup>30</sup>*you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'* <sup>31</sup>*The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* *There is no other commandment greater than these."*

**Is there anybody on this planet for whom that commandment should not apply?** So simply put, God's **will** is to do what God has commissioned **everyone** to do: **love God, love neighbor.**

Those are the **easy** answers...But the **trouble** with easy answers – even if they’re correct – is that they’re often not ***rough-and-tumble enough*** to help us put them to work in our everyday experiences of life.

So one of Luther’s insights here is to add another question to ask (do you see why Pr. Julie and I ask you questions? We CAN’T HELP IT – WE’RE LUTHERANS!!!). Anyway, as you can see on page 1163, the first question Luther asks is ***What does this mean?***

But it’s the **second** question that sometimes brings a sense of clarity – **especially** with these two petitions about God’s **kingdom** and God’s **will**. So Luther also asks: ***How does this come about?*** It’s not enough to know **what** it is – it’s just as important to determine **how** it becomes real...***for us!!!***

***Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...***

So how does God’s kingdom come about? Listen to Jesus’ parable of the Mustard Seed...

### **Luke 13:18-19**

<sup>18</sup>(Jesus said) *“What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? <sup>19</sup>It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.”*

Now, if you’re like me, that parable doesn’t really help all that much – it’s a nice image of something little growing into something big that can be a blessing to creation. But it doesn’t really explain much about the Kingdom of Heaven...which means that we have to take a step back and ask our questions in a different way.

One theologian did that and realized that the word kingdom can **also** be translated as ***reign*** or ***rule***. So instead of saying the **kingdom** of God is like a mustard seed, it could very well be that Jesus is saying that the ***reign*** of God is like a mustard seed.

I **like** that for a couple of reasons. It gets us **away** from fixating on **what** and **where heaven** is, and gets us **back** into the arms of **Who** is God and **how** is God working in our lives. Then the essence of Luther’s *“How does this happen?”* answer is this: God’s Spirit is constantly at work helping us...you know it...***love God and love our neighbor.***

I also like this parable because it reinforces for us the great image of God as a farmer – planting seeds...growing things that help us in life. So in this sense, doing the work of the kingdom, doing the work of God's **reign** or **rule**...**is**, in a **very real** sense, all about...planting seeds.

With that in mind, let's turn to the Gospel story about the Prodigal Son, his Father and his older Brother. As I mentioned in the announcements, I think it makes sense to imagine what kinds of seeds each character in the story is planting. And when we answer that question, I think we'll also discover the answer to our question about God's will for our lives.

So help me out here: **What kind of seeds does each character in the story plant?**

Younger Son:	Wild oats, plus possibly: contrition, confession, conversion...
Older Brother:	Jealousy, envy, anger, hard-heartedness...
Father:	Patience, grace, forgiveness, welcome, love

***Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...***

I think it's pretty clear from this parable that the **reign of God** must look a lot like the **father** in the story. This means that the **will of God**, then, is for us to go out into the world planting the same kinds of seeds: patience, grace, forgiveness, welcome and love in all that we do, to all whom we **meet**. Now, this is much more than a chore that we should do because it's the right thing to do. This is the very will of God who will see to it that this will is done on our hearts and through our lives. Turn to the passage from Isaiah and listen as I re-read verses 10-12:

*<sup>10</sup>For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, <sup>11</sup>so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. <sup>12</sup>For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands (Isaiah 55:10-12).*

I like how C. S. Lewis puts it in his book The Joyful Christian. Writes Lewis, *Aim at Heaven and you will get Earth 'thrown in.'* *Aim at Earth, and you will get neither.*

***Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven... Amen.***