

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, June 12, 2022
Matthew 6:9-13**

UNTIL THE KINGDOM COMES

I learned in my introductory Greek class decades ago that the last syllable of a word is called the *ultima*. Some of you probably already knew that. *Ultima* is the feminine form of the Latin word *ultimus*, which means “farthest” or “last.” The next-to-last syllable is the *penult* or *penultima*, which means “that which is almost last.” The syllable before the *penult* is called the *antepenult* or *antepenultima*, which means “what comes before what is almost last.” Are you tracking with me?

Ultimus or *ultima* is the root of our English word “ultimate,” which the dictionary defines as “final” or “coming at the end.” Another meaning of ultimate is “the best of its kind,” as in: “This car is the ultimate in luxury and performance.” When Oswald Chambers titled his classic devotional *My Utmost for His Highest*, he was saying that God deserves the utmost – the ultimate – of our allegiance, devotion, love, and faithful obedience.

Shifting from syllables to sermons, today’s message is not my *ultima* as the pastor of Faith. It is the *penultima*, the almost last, the one that comes before the last.

Our Scripture reading for today is a very familiar passage from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6, where Jesus gives His disciples instructions on prayer. Let us give our full and reverent attention to the reading of God’s holy Word from Matthew 6:9-13.

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I don’t expect any of you to remember, though at least a few of you were here, that I preached on this passage in my very first sermon here at Faith, in April 1997, just before the congregation voted to call me as your pastor. It was one of the most momentous days of my life. For both me and my family. Now, as then, I want to focus on the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer – three words at the beginning of verse 10: “Your kingdom come.”

WHAT WOULD JESUS SAY?

Years ago, not long after I graduated from Princeton Seminary (please don’t hold it against me!) and was ordained as a pastor, I asked a group of elders in our church in Downingtown, PA: What “sermon” do you think Jesus would preach if He came to our church this Sunday?

Here is how one of the elders (Paul Holtan) responded. He said: “I don’t know exactly what Jesus would say, but I know what I would do: I would go out and tell everyone I could about this marvelous teacher and His life-changing message!”

I hope you would do the same, because that is the kind of effect Jesus had – and has – on people. As Peter acknowledged, Jesus alone has the words of eternal life (John 6:68). People

of all ages came to Him to be refreshed and renewed spiritually. He awakened people from their spiritual lethargy. He rekindled the flames of love and hope in their hearts. He gave them living water (John 4:10; 7:38) to satisfy their spiritual thirst. He met people at their point of deepest need. He opened sin-blinded eyes and gave people a new vision of life in the kingdom of God.

And He still does. Jesus still has that kind of effect on people today. Today – right now – He is able to refresh and energize anyone and everyone who comes to Him. Not least when we come together for worship. The experience of worship in the fellowship of God’s people recharges us, it reinvigorates us, to return to the world outside this sanctuary in the power of Jesus to live for the sake of His kingdom.

I imagine that Jesus would have plenty of things to say to us if He were physically present with us today, including some things we would rather not hear. But I have a feeling that, whatever else He might say, Jesus would talk with us about the kingdom of God, about the sovereign and gracious rule of God in our lives.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In the Gospels, Jesus talked about the kingdom of God (or kingdom of heaven, as Matthew usually referred to it) pretty much more than anything else. The word “kingdom” (*basileia* in Greek) occurs more than 120 times in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and most of the time it comes directly from the lips of Jesus.

The first announcement of the kingdom of God in the New Testament comes from John the Baptist who, as we noted last Sunday, called on people to repent of their sins and turn to God – why? “For the kingdom of heaven (God) has come near” (Matthew 3:2). Then, when Jesus went public with His ministry, He declared: “The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15; cf. Matthew 4:17).

The kingdom of God, as longtime missionary E. Stanley Jones said, “was the center and circumference of all (Jesus) taught and did.” It is really the most important theme in the teaching of Jesus. When Jesus spoke to His disciples or the crowds in parables, He would say: “This is what the kingdom of God is like.” It is like a banquet or a wedding feast. Like treasure hidden in a field. Like a fishing net cast wide, a mustard seed, a fig tree, or yeast. Like a farmer who plants seeds in different kinds of soil, like wheat and weeds growing together, like laborers in a vineyard who all receive the same pay, like ten bridesmaids (five silly and five smart, as it says in *The Message*), and more.

In addition to His parables, Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God on other occasions. He said, for example, that it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God (Mark 10:23-27). The truth, it is hard not just for those who are rich in things; it is hard for everyone, rich or poor. In one sense, it is impossible. It is impossible for any of us to enter the kingdom of God, *except for the grace of God. Except for the saving work of Jesus the Son of God on the cross.* The only way you or I or anyone can be saved and enter the kingdom of God, no matter how rich or poor we are in material things, is by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

Grace, as I hope you know, is a gift that comes free of charge to people who don't deserve it and never will. Like us.

The kingdom of God, says Jesus, must be received "like a little child" (Mark 10:15). He warns that not everyone who says to Him "Lord, Lord," will be welcomed into the kingdom of God. Words alone are not enough; what Jesus is looking for is genuine faith that produces obedience to the will of God the Father (Matthew 7:21). Jesus also speaks of a great reversal in which tax collectors (crooked businessmen known for their dishonesty and greed) and prostitutes would enter the kingdom of God ahead of the ultra-religious, self-righteous Pharisees (Matthew 21:31-32).

When the Pharisees accused Him of doing miracles by the power of the devil, Jesus called them out and said: "If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matthew 12:28). On another occasion, when asked when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus said: "The kingdom of God is already among you" (Luke 17:21, MSG). It is here. Right now.

Though the word "kingdom" occurs only five times in the Gospel of John, it still carries a lot of weight. Jesus uses it twice in His conversation with Nicodemus, the Jewish leader who came to see Him at night. Jesus said to him: "Unless they are born again, no one can see the kingdom of God.... No one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water [physical birth] and the Spirit" (John 3:3-5). Though he had trouble coming to grips with what Jesus was saying, I'd like to believe the light eventually went on for Nicodemus and that he became a follower of Jesus.

The other place in the Gospel of John where the word "kingdom" appears is in John 18, where Jesus is on trial before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. In John 18:36, Jesus says to Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my followers would fight so that I would not be handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my kingdom is not from here." It is not the world's kind of kingdom. And Jesus is not the world's kind of king.

The kingdom of God, simply put, is the place where God rules. It is the place where God's will is done. It is not a geographical territory or a political entity. It is not defined by state or national boundaries. The kingdom of God is wherever God rules as King. In one sense, of course, that means heaven, because heaven is the place where God is exalted and worshipped as God, the place where His will is done perfectly and joyfully, the place where there is no sin, no evil, no suffering, no sorrow, no death.

In another sense, the sphere of God's kingdom is the entire created universe. Though millions of people deny it and fight against it, the Bible teaches that God is sovereign over all things and in all places, that every square inch of the universe rightly belongs to Him. Because it is all His, the day will come when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11).

When we pray, as we do in the Lord's Prayer, "Your kingdom come," we are praying for that day to come. We are praying for the kingdom that Jesus inaugurated in His incarnate life to be

fully and completely established here on earth. It is a prayer, as Leon Morris, said, for the kingdom of God to be established by God for us, not by us for God (Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 145). The kingdom of God is not something we can create or establish. It is a God-thing. It is *God's* kingdom, not ours. And yet.

And yet God invites us to participate with Him in the growth of His kingdom in the world He has made. There is another, vitally important, aspect of the kingdom of God. Not only is heaven the kingdom of God. Not only is His kingdom the created universe, much of which is still in rebellion against God. The kingdom of God also exists in the heart and life of every follower of Jesus, every person – young or old, rich or poor, educated or not, male or female, from every race and tribe and language and nation – who trusts in Jesus Christ as Savior and submits to His gracious and sovereign rule in his or her life. Which includes you and me, if we have been gripped by God's grace.

YOUR KINGDOM COME

When we say “Your kingdom come,” we are praying that the kingdom Jesus inaugurated – the kingdom of which we are a part by God's sovereign grace through the gift of faith – may grow and continue to grow through the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the witness of the church, and that more and more people in Kingstowne, Alexandria, Springfield, Burke, Annandale, Arlington, Fairfax, Fairfax Station, Lorton, Woodbridge, Manassas, and everywhere else in Northern Virginia, the District of Columbia, the “DMV”, throughout the US and around the world will come to know and trust Jesus Christ as Savior, and live grateful, glad, and faithful lives under His loving Lordship.

We are also praying for the kingdom of God to fully come. We are praying for the kingdom of God to have its consummation and completion when Jesus returns in glory. We are praying for an end to evil and injustice, an end to hatred and violence, an end to rebellion against God, an end to brokenness and despair, an end to deception and false philosophies, an end to idolatry in all its forms, an end of ungrace in the way people treat one another. We are praying for the triumph of God's love and grace and justice and peace, for the triumph of good over evil, for the triumph of truth (God's truth) over lies. We are praying for the triumph of God over all His enemies. We pray it knowing that God *has* prevailed in the suffering and death and resurrection of Jesus from the dead. We know that God *will* prevail in His perfect time.

Did you know that all of that is encompassed in those three words: “Your kingdom come”?

The kingdom of God has a double focus, both present and future. It has arrived in the person and work of Jesus; it has already come. But it has not fully come. There is still more to come. It is both already and not yet: Already here, but not yet completely here.

UNTIL THE KINGDOM COMES

All of which, I think, begs the question: Until the kingdom comes – until the kingdom of God comes in its fullness when Jesus returns in power and glory – what does God want us to do?

Until the kingdom comes, what kind of people does God want us – you, me, all of us, His church, Faith Church – to be?

One answer is that Jesus wants us, as He says in Matthew 6:33, to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” In the context of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is saying that we are to give higher priority to the kingdom of God – to the rule of God in our lives and in the world – than to things like food, clothing, money, power, security, sex, the pursuit of happiness, or anything else that would produce anxiety or worry and draw our hearts away from God. The kingdom of God is to take precedence over all the things you want or think you need to be happy and fulfilled.

Until the kingdom comes, Jesus says, “Seek first the kingdom of God.” Seek the kingdom of God and the glory of God above all things. That is the purpose of your life. Your personal happiness or fulfillment is not what you were made for. Does God want you to be happy? Yes. Absolutely. But He is far more interested in your holiness than your happiness. Happiness is not the goal; it is a by-product of living your life in a personal, loving, faith-filled relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Put God and His kingdom first in your life, and He will take care of the details.

Until the kingdom comes in its fullness, what kind of people does God want us to be?

He wants us to be *ambassadors for Christ* (2 Corinthians 5:20), people who represent the Savior and His interests in a broken, hurting, rebellious world. He wants us to be *people who point to the Savior* in both our speech and conduct. He wants us to be *imitators of God*, to follow His example and model His love (Ephesians 5:1-2). Just like Jesus.

Until the kingdom comes in its fullness, what kind of people does God want us to be? He wants us to be *different from the world*. Not for the sake of being different or eccentric. Not to draw attention to ourselves. But to draw attention to the Savior, to the beauty of His character and the power of His love.

There is an old story about a missionary who was teaching a Bible study to some Hindu women in India. Part way through the study, one of the women got up and walked out. A few minutes later she came back and listened more intently than before. When it was over, the missionary asked her why she had left. She said: “I was so moved by what you were saying about Jesus that I went out to your carriage driver and asked him if you really lived the way you talk. When he said you did, I hurried back so I wouldn’t miss anything.”

Until the kingdom comes in its fullness, that is how Jesus wants us to live. He wants our lives, our love, our character to match our profession of faith in Him.

Until the kingdom comes, God wants us to be *people of prayer*. He wants us to keep on praying for His kingdom to come. He wants us, as it says in Luke 18:1, to “always pray and not give up.” As you may have heard it said, there is never a time when it is not time to pray. Until the kingdom comes, God wants us to keep on praying, believing that God hears and answers our prayers in His time.

Until the kingdom comes, God wants us to be *people of the Book* as well, *People of the Bible*. People who recognize and submit to its authority as the inspired, infallible, unerring Word of God. There will never be a time when you no longer need the Bible. Nor will you ever arrive at a place where you have nothing more to learn from the Bible. Until the kingdom comes, “let the message of Christ have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives” (Colossians 3:16, MSG).

Until the kingdom comes, allow God to continue to mold, shape, refine, and strengthen you by His Word.

Until the kingdom comes, be *people of grace* in a world of ungrace. Let the church – *this* church – always be *a place of grace where Jesus is Lord and every person counts*. There is not a single, solitary person in this world who does not need grace. As people who have received and experienced grace from God, we are to extend grace not only to one another, but to the “others” in our lives, including those who are hard to love. Until the kingdom comes, be *instruments of God’s amazing grace*.

Until the kingdom comes, be *people who model unity in the essentials of the faith, liberty in the non-essentials, and love in all things*.

Until the kingdom comes, we are to *be about the King’s business*, because we are His adopted sons and daughters by faith, and we are citizens of His eternal kingdom. I gladly pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, but my highest allegiance is not to any nation or political party or church denomination. My first and highest allegiance is to God and God alone. As Paul says, “Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we eagerly await our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20). Let there be no doubt about your status as a citizen of the kingdom of God and your allegiance to the King.

Until the kingdom comes, we are to be *people of the kingdom*. As an old country preacher said: “You got to be who you is, because if you ain’t who you is then you is who you ain’t.” Your identity is defined not by your skin color, sexual orientation, political ideology, or national origin. It is defined by your relationship to Jesus, the King of Kings. You got to be who you is – who you are – as a fully-devoted follower of Jesus and a citizen of God’s kingdom.

Mother Teresa, one of the most influential Christians of the 20th century, defined herself this way: “By blood and origin, I am all Albanian. My citizenship is Indian. I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the whole world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to Jesus” (Quoted in Ruth Tucker, *Guardians of the Great Commission*).

May our hearts belong entirely to Jesus as well. That’s the most important thing. Until the kingdom comes, kingdom people is what we are meant to be. Lord, let it be so in us, to the glory of Your name. Amen.