

March 25 – Palm/Passion Sunday

For Yours Is the Kingdom

I Chronicles 29:11-13

Today we end our examination of what I like to call, “The Disciple’s Prayer.” The concluding lines are a doxology, “For yours is the kingdom, the power and glory forever. Amen.” This doxology was likely not a part of the prayer Jesus taught to his disciples. The earliest copies that we have of Matthew and Luke’s Gospels do not contain the doxology. Yet, around 100 years later we find copies of these Gospels with the doxology. It was these later versions that Jerome used when translating the Bible from Greek to Latin. His Bible became the official Bible of the church for almost one thousand years. Because of this, the doxology became a part of the prayer. This history is why you do not find the doxology in current translations of the Bible because they have gone back to the earliest copies believing they are the most accurate. This is also the reason that there are a few churches today who do not recite it as part of the prayer.

Where did it come from? It likely comes from David’s blessing prayer that he gave at the time of receiving offerings for building the Temple. I read that scripture this morning. This doxology of praise was often used during worship in the synagogue and so was also likely used in early Christian worship. It is not hard to imagine how the early church might have said the Lord’s Prayer and soon thereafter the doxology of praise to God, and then over time they were combined into one prayer. Even though it is an add on, the weight of history says it is just as important as the rest of the prayer, and shares with us great truths we need to remember. It is a summary, in part, of all that we have spoken of before.

Many scholars note how the three nouns, kingdom, power and glory remind us of Jesus’ three temptations in the wilderness as he prepared to begin his ministry. First, the tempter invited Jesus to turn stones into bread. This could have been a road to substantial glory. When Jesus did multiply the loaves and fishes he drew great crowds afterwards. The Gospels even hint that some were coming to see Jesus because he fed them. We can all be tempted by glory. Who doesn’t like the words of praise, being told

that what we have done was awesome. How easy it is to begin to expect or demand such praise or only do things that get us praise. This prayer reminds us that it is God alone who gets the true glory.

The second temptation was to challenge Jesus to show off his power over natural laws by throwing himself off the Temple without being hurt. This temptation sits right alongside the first because the use of power and the desire for glory often come from the same selfish core. Jesus knew that exhibitions of power would amaze but ultimately not draw people to God. This is why he rejected it. Throughout his ministry the displays of power such as quelling storms and walking on the water were seen only by a select few. Even most of his healing miracles were done quietly, not to impress, though a few were done to make a point to the Pharisees. A famous quote is: power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. In reminding ourselves frequently that to God belongs all power, hopefully will keep its corrupting influence from warping our actions and how we see others.

The last temptation was to worship the tempter and, if he did so, Jesus would receive all the kingdoms of the world. Whenever we set aside the principles of faith for success we are in trouble. As we will talk about in this sermon, it is hard to stay faithful to God's kingdom. The temptation to go along with the crowd is one that pulls at us. So we can see that glory, power, and kingdom-building were tempting to Jesus but he resisted all three. Each time we say this prayer, we are reminding ourselves of those same temptations and reminding ourselves that God is in charge, and to God our loyalty belongs.

There are three things that I believe this doxology is pointing us towards, as people of faith, when we try to say and live out the Disciple's prayer.

First of all to say "Yours is the Kingdom" means we are pledging to do something about making the world a place that reflects the Kingdom virtues God desires. We have been commissioned to go into the world as God's agents of restoration and to bring heaven to earth. We talked about this earlier when we looked at the phrase "thy kingdom come." We are to live as citizens of God's kingdom, not just say the words. We

know what that type of citizenship looks like. It means being loving, forgiving, and helping. Even more, it means a willingness to advocate for change. The United Methodist Church has as its mission statement, "Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." We are not only in the business of winning people to Christ; we are about making this world a better and more loving place. Where can you make a difference? Perhaps it is in volunteering. Maybe it is advocating for new policies. Perhaps it is challenging a friend when the words they are speaking are less than gracious. When we say "Yours is the kingdom" it is a word of hope, especially at dark times in our world and a challenge for each of us to stand up and proclaim our allegiance to God by our action and words.

When we say "and the power" it is a reminder of who is really in charge of our life and we are making a pledge to align ourselves with God. My sister has an acronym she often uses. When someone cuts her off in traffic or is only talking about themselves in business dealings and not caring about anyone else, she says, "There is another AAM" AAM stands for All About Me. People who live this way see themselves as the center of their universe, and believe everything should swirl around them and dance to their tunes. When we acknowledge God has the power, we have to realize that we are not in control. It isn't about what we want or need, but about what God wants in the world.

Finally, as we repeat this doxology we should do it with a deep sense of commitment. We say it in confidence, knowing that if we live out the teachings in the prayer, then God's glory will be seen throughout the world. God's kingdom will truly come "on earth as it is in heaven," and, as we await the final consummation of the Kingdom, we can and will experience a foretaste of that Kingdom of God here and now.

I think of this day in the church year. We call it Palm and Passion Sunday. This is done in recognition that many churches do not have Good Friday services and, even if they do, most people do not attend. To go, theologically from waving palm branches and shouting "hosanna" to shouting "he is risen" without embracing the message of the cross is partly how the church has gotten so mixed up. Palm Sunday is about glory and power on earth. It is celebrating the messiah coming to Jerusalem and all going out to see him. Easter is about God in Christ coming in ultimate glory.

This doxology reminds us that there is more. Kingdom building is costly. Jesus died trying to bring in a kingdom of love and justice. Jesus shrank from this cost in the garden when he asked that the burden be removed from him. But ultimately, he wished to live in God's purposes and kingdom whatever the cost. He eventually died on a cross because he would not give in to the temptations to take the easy way. He could have stayed away from Jerusalem. He could have made accommodations with the High Priest and the Pharisees. It would have allowed him to live longer, share more of the good news but at such a cost. His prayer in the garden was, "Not my will but yours, O God." That is the cost of really saying the power is yours God. I support your kingdom, whatever the cost.

And that last word we say in any prayer should not be taken lightly. Amen is to say "so be it" or "that is truth." When we say Amen we are turning ourselves over to God's rule, majesty and dominion.

The Prayer focus I am giving you this week is partly related to this passage but even more to the journey that we will be taking through Holy Week. "Lord, I remember the tremendous cost it takes to be faithful. Forgive me when I have taken the easy path and help me to lead a life that glorifies you in all that I do".

As I conclude this series I hope you take at least two things from it. One, is to see this prayer as a call to living faithfully as a community. Jesus never has us use the words "I" or "me" in this prayer but always "us" and "our." The reminder that we are interconnected should challenge us always. The other is faithfulness is hard and challenging but achievable because God is with us. AMEN.