4th Sunday after Trinity
3rd in a Series on the Lord's Prayer
Rolling Meadows, 1965

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 6: 9,10 Our Father who art in Heaven; Thy Kingdom Come!

THY KINGDOM COME

Where is the Kingdom of God? The question is not new. People have been asking this same question, in one way or another, since time immemorial. Some have come to the conclusion that God's kingdom is not real, having nothing to do with real life in our real world. Others, who in all sincerity would like to believe, find themselves completely confused and bewildered about what the Kingdom of God really is. Even our Lord's disciples were not clear on this point. After spending three years with Jesus, they were still perplexed. On the Day of His Ascension into heaven, they were still asking: Lord is this the time when You are going to restore the Kingdom to Israel? Jesus' answer was brief and to the point: It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has reserved to His own power. But you will receive power after that the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be witnesses unto Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. Ten days later these few men knew better than anyone could have told them what all must pray for when they say, Our Father who art in heaven, Thy kingdom come!

There are few kings today and fewer kingdoms. In modern terms Christ is saying, God is at work! Blasting is going on, and building! If we were to translate this petition into modern language, we would probably have to say, Let God show Himself to be Boss. Or in Biblical terms, Let God be God - Let God be King of kings and Lord of lords in the hearts of all who pray and in the whole wide world: Thy kingdom come! When you have said that, you have said a mouthful. Ever since the Fall of Adam and Eve into sin, men have refused to let God have His place in their hearts and lives. In stubborn self-will they have gone off into the far country, away from the Father and the Father's house. They have given themselves over to the dominion of alien lords and tyrants. And there are no exceptions here, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. The ultimate and inevitable result of such a life, apart from God, is divine judgment. It is true that people mock and scoff at the prospect, but that is just the point. For God's judgment

does not consist in His destroying the offenders with a thunderbolt from heaven. It consists rather in His leaving them to their own wretchedness and compelling them to pursue their chosen road to the end. God gives them up, says St. Paul. He leaves them to themselves - this is His fearful judgment. There is nothing mo terrible than the man who is left to himself. For all the instincts and energies which were meant to be directed toward God and now turned in upon himself, and he becomes the victim of his own self-seeking.

Like most preachers, I have often felt compelled to preach repentance. But when I do, I somehow feel as if I were a tiny, little cloud in the vast expanse of a blue sky whom people refuse to believe because they refuse to understar the signs of the times. As in the days of Noah, They ~~are~~ go on eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, and laughing at those who are building their arks in order to withstand the floods and the judgments. And I dare to say that if the truth were known, a great many of us who outwardly belong to the church would fall into this category. These are the "unchurched" churched, the"unChristianized" Christians, who honor God with their lips while their heart is far from Him.

And yet, in the same measure as men turn away from God and go reeling indifferently along their own merry way - so God's Kingdom mysteriously goes on growing on earth - even now. Fully in control of the situation, God rules and He continues to bring His great and ultimate plans for the world to fulfillment. Unlike the kingdoms of men and of nations, the Kingdom of God can be seen now only to the eyes of faith. We must not think of it as a gradual Christianization of the world which will increasingly eliminate evil. It is no grand and glorious utopia. Rather it is found in the midst of the world's anguish and distress, in the midst of wars and rumors of war where men's hearts are failing them for fear - there God is building His Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God is where Jesus is. But Jesus is always found in the darkest places in the world. John the Baptist had to learn this as he sat in prison, watching the collapse of all his previous illusions about the Kingdom of God. He saw the judgment with great Biblical realism, and he preached it with

power. But, like many of his contemporaries, he doubtless thought of the Kingdom of God, which was to follow the judgment, as an earthly, Messianic state of order and peace and prosperity. And now bitter disappointment crept into his heart, fo Jesus, upon whom he had set all his hopes, seemed to be nothing more than a great preacher, only a man who practiced brotherly love. No cosmic revolution sprang up in His footsteps. He went His way like all the rest. And the dark, demonic powers were still lurking in their hiding places - sometimes openly irrupting in sores and pains, in death and suffering, in wars and disasters, sweeping down lik bloody scourges upon those who sought in vain to escape the darkness and the shadow of death. For weeks he had sat in his gloomy prison, and Jesus had done nothing to release him. This could surely not be the Kingdom of God. That is why he sent his disciples to Jesus with the despairing question: Are You He who is to come, or shall we look for another? And the answer he received from Jesus was: The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have Good News preached to them. The Kingdom of God appears precisely at the place where there is blindness, lameness, leprosy, and death. It does not shun any of these things because it is too good for the slums and haunts of misery God is not aloof from the cares & troubles of life. Not at all - the Kingdom of God is the light that shines in the black places of the earth where people sit in darkness.

So when Jesus was asked when the Kingdom of God was coming, He replied (secretly pointing to Himself): The Kingdom of God is in the midst of you. It's right here, just as I am standing here in the midst of you. The majority of those who were there did not understand. They cherished the delusion that the Kingdom of God would be an earthly utopia where ease and comfort reigned. But if this were so, then surely it could not be in the midst of them. For they had only to look around at those who were standing there with them to see precious little of that kind of utopian ease. What they did see was the whole host of human misery: eyes speaking the dull speech of despair, bodies crippled and deformed, the furtive glances of the guilty, and the callous insensibility that turns a man away from his neighbor in preoccupation with his own troubles. And right here Jesus says, Right here in the midst of this misery the Kingdom of God has come. For I

for Christ

am here. God came all the way down to those who were heavy laden with guilt and misery. He squandered His whole heart upon them. Here, in the depths, He establishes His rule; and here He teaches us what belongs to the transitory side of life and what has to do with God's eternity. Here we learn to know the rod and the staff of the Good Shepherd Himself. The person who has gone through the nigh of suffering with his hand in the hand of God, the person who has said to himself in the midst of the screaming and the noise and the blood and the tears of life, If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord - that persons has experienced what the hand of God means, and he knows what it is to pray: Our Father who art in heaven, Thy kingdom come!

One day the hiddenness will be removed and the wonder of the works of God, the wonder of His dominion will be spread out before the eyes of all. Now God's rule is hidden beneath the Cross, and only he who accepts the Cross knows the secret. But one day it will be made clear and every knee shall bow - whether men fall to their knees in adoration or whether they are forced to their knees by the power of the Lord whose glory can no longer be overlooked. The moment will come when God will be all in all. And that moment comes at the end of that hidden and tortuous road of the Cross where God seems to be nothing at all. This is our comfort as we carry our cross and make our pilgrimage through life - that it ends in glory. Joseph Wittig once said that a man's biography should begin not with his birth but with his death. For a man's life is revealed only by its end, its goal. In exactly the same way it can be said that the secret of history is revealed only as we see its end. Actually, this is the way the Scriptures look at the history of the world. Even though the first pages of the Bible start out with the very beginning of creation, they already include the end and the goal. For the intent of these pages is not to disclose so much where man came from, but wher he is going; their purpose is to outline the plan that God has for us and all the world. Therefore the real book of the secret of history is the Revelation of St. John. There the course of the world is revealed as seen from its end; there it ends in the songs of angels and the redeemed; there the kingdom has come in all

its fullness and splendor.

Already we are living in the name and the promise of that end. The daw is breaking, and soon we shall reach our destination. And while the angels are singing their praises, because the Kingdom of God is in motion, we pray that ~~it comes to us in~~ it may come to us ~~the power of His Word~~ - to us who dwell beneath the angels' praise. Therefore: ~~Look up and lift up your head, because your redemption is drawing near~~.... ~~Pray like this~~: Our Father who art in heaven, Thy Kingdom come! Amen.