

Rappahannock Christian Church – 9/11/11

Dr. Kenneth Wilbur

Communion Meditation

“So, what’s up?” “How’s it going?” We say this to each other often, don’t we?

As we gather here at this communion table we are given precious time to search *ourselves* and ask, “How’s it going?”

For some of us, life is very good right now; others may be in pain, or might have suffered a terrible loss or been sorely disappointed. This is the time for renewal. It is a chance for us to realize that, no matter whether we are experiencing ups or downs, Jesus Christ is lifting us up. No blessing can surpass this.

There is no greater proof that God is for us and not against us than the sacrifice that Christ made for us and for the world. So as you partake of the Bread and the Cup today, be sure to remember that you are not alone. We are with you, and God is always with you. Let me take you to the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 – The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

On Earth As It Is In Heaven

Our Scripture reading this morning comes from Matthew 6. It is a very familiar passage to all of us. We are going to take a break from following the Common Lectionary for a few weeks to do a brief study of the Lord’s Prayer.

Matthew 6:9-13 – “This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.

I should begin my message by acknowledging that today is the 10th anniversary of the terrorist attacks of 9/11/2001. I know that preachers all over the country today will be pronouncing judgments one way and another about this event. Perhaps they will praise, or maybe they will criticize, our country's past or present leaders. I can’t say that I feel qualified to make those kinds of pronouncements. I feel terribly sad about what

happened. But I do not have the inside track on what has been done or what should be done. I have to trust my leaders and pray that our enemies will see the light and come to repentance.

What I will do today is turn our attention to the New Testament. As Christians, we may not have control of world events, but we can look at ourselves, as those saved by God's grace, and make up our minds to put the Way of Christ into practice. Today and next Sunday we will be looking at the Lord's Prayer together.

Matthew 6 records this very brief prayer. Though it is short -- just a few lines in length -- I believe that it contains the very essence of Christ's Way. It behooves us to look at it carefully.

It is a prayer in two parts. Simple! The pattern is this: God first, then us. That's the broad outline of the prayer. Today we'll take a look at the first part.

The first thing we notice is that Jesus instructs us to address God as "*our Father.*"

"Our Father?" This seems normal to us. It's how we've been taught to address God. But this was not the case for the Jews of Jesus' time. "Our Father?" They would have gasped! How can he have the audacity to address God as his father?!!! More than that, there is reason to believe that the Aramaic word Jesus used was the word *abba*. It's the word which a very small child would have used to address his father. It is a close, intimate word used in the home, in the family. This intimate word is the word Jesus used when calling out to God AND, because it is the opening of Jesus' model prayer, it is the endearing word that Jesus instructs US, his disciples, to use. Shocking!

Next in the prayer are the words, "*hallowed be your name.*" May your name, O God, be hallowed, holy, revered, respected! Our first desire is that God be honored and served. We are horrified, scandalized, to think that there are people in the world who do not revere and respect Him. How can this be?! It should not be so! Every knee should bow! So what we express right away in our prayer, that which is of first importance, is our desire to see *everyone* revere God and hold His name to be holy and respected.

"*Your kingdom come.*" This seems like a somewhat strange request, since we know that Jesus' great, bold announcement to Israel was that God's kingdom had come. "The kingdom of God is at hand! Repent and believe the good news!" This was Jesus' claim. The miracles he performed were proof of it! So why are we praying for God's kingdom to come? Well, I think that what Jesus means is for us to want God's kingdom to come *in all its fullness*. We are to pray for that day to come when ALL God's enemies are under His feet. No opponents, no enemies, no one who rejects or refuses God's will.

"*Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" This line is almost identical to the last one. It is a prayer for God's rule to be absolute, complete, like it is in heaven. There is no dissension in heaven. There is no disobedience, no hesitation. A holy God deserves

this kind of unquestioning obedience. It is the honor He is due. It is our prayer that it may be this way on earth, as we know it is in heaven above!

We'll stop there and go on to the second part of the prayer next week.

We have called this prayer Jesus' "model prayer." Jesus prayed a lot of prayers. Not all of them follow this pattern. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" is an example of one of Jesus' prayers that is not very much like this one. This is what it is like for us, too, sometimes. We need God's help or inspiration while we are on the run, busy, busy, busy! But when we have time to sit and think and commune with God in prayer (as I hope we do, many times!), then this prayer is an excellent model to use. It is right for us to begin by honoring, exalting, and worshipping God. Our own needs come second.

You know, I would even go so far as to say that this prayer could be a model for our very lives. We must be oriented to God first and, only then, toward ourselves. This is the foundation upon which our whole life should be built. God is first. God is supreme. Pleasing God is our first and highest goal in life! As we repeat this prayer every Sunday, are these just words, or do we really mean them? Do our lives reflect this priority? If so, then it should be obvious to all that God has no rival in our lives.

This makes me think of Joshua. Do you remember how Israel had wandered in the wilderness for 40 years? After Moses died, Joshua led them into the Promised Land. There on the bank of the Jordan River he issued them a challenge. Do you remember this? He said, "Choose you this day whom you will serve," and then he adds, "But as for me and my house, *we will serve the Lord.*" It makes no difference what others think or believe. It makes no difference how they choose to live. As the Lord's Prayer says, we will hallow and respect God's name and give Him our obedience!

Let me also point out that this "God first, us second" pattern is the pattern of our worship service here each Sunday. We begin with a call to worship and a hymn of praise. Why? It is because God is the audience. God is being worshipped, honored, exalted among us. Singing a hymn of praise prepares our hearts and minds to worship God as we should. It re-orient us after the world has messed up our hearts and minds for a whole week! It helps us to get our priorities back in order.

God is Highest! God is First!

Benediction

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:7