

Bible Study 5: Your Kingdom come

*Jesus said, "Pray then in this way:
Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one." (Matthew 6: 9-13)*

God's kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven

When Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, their context was very difficult, living under the Roman occupation, an agrarian society with most people living in conditions of scarcity, particularly food. Prayer in Jewish tradition was central to devotion to God, and what and how one prayed reflected their view of God and what mattered most for life and godliness.

First, Jesus wanted his disciples to know that God, who created the heavens and the earth, is the Father, who loves and cares. Therefore it is important as his children to first seek what matters most to the Father: his Name, his kingdom and his will. As God's children, the disciples' passion is to seek his kingdom and will to suffuse all life "on earth as it is in heaven".

This is in keeping with the witness of all the Scriptures. Psalm 24:1 proclaims "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it." This earth, this world, this humanity is the Lord's. 'For God so loved the world' (John 3:16). It is a world that God loves. It's the Lord's - this earth, now under the cloud of COVID-19. The critical questions for us ought to be: What does 'kingdom come' mean? What are the signs of the Kingdom at this time? What is God's will in this moment?

The clue to the answers to these questions is in what else Jesus says ought to preoccupy the believers' petitions: daily bread, forgiveness, protection from severe trial and deliverance from evil. It behoves us to try to dig deep to understand what each of these petitions mean, remembering that Jesus' immediate audience were an exploited and marginalised people. To make sense of God's kingdom and will during the COVID-19 pandemic, we need look to those on the margins of our societies and its impact on them.

Take the petition 'give us today our daily bread'. Christians today interpret the idea of daily bread in many ways: as literal food, as spiritual nourishment, as the bread of heaven, as our dependence on God for everything, and in other ways too. Many of us, reading this, will not think of 'literal food' because we know where to get it: in the supermarket or just in our refrigerators. We need to try to hear the words of Jesus from the perspective of those for whom the uncertainty of daily bread is a long-lived anxiety, now even more acute.

For many people gaining 'daily bread' has long been a struggle and a daily prayer. This reality of hunger, loss of income and debt has become all the more critical with the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, affecting the poorest most but also many others in society. Day labourers may no longer be able to earn their evening meal. People are losing their jobs and going into debt. Trading is disrupted. The most vulnerable, including the homeless, migrants and refugees, struggle as support services are closed. Parents worry how they will feed their children.

This pandemic is an invitation for all of us to ask questions about our world. What does it mean for God's kingdom to come and God's will be done in the time of COVID-19? *



Questions for discussion

Read Matthew 6:9-13.

1. What is going on in our community in this time of COVID-19?
2. What could it mean for God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done on earth at this time?
3. What are the signs of the kingdom at this moment?
4. What are those people most affected by the pandemic saying to the Church?
5. Anxiety about daily bread, loss of income and debts is now an increased reality, especially for the most vulnerable in our communities. Why is this? How can we as the church respond?
6. The kingdom of God is here. We are all called by God to contribute in different ways using our different gifts to bring about God's will for the kingdom. What then should we pray? And what actions should each one of us take to help God's kingdom become fully present on earth?

Prayer

Let us pray the Lord's Prayer together.

[From a theological reflection by Rt Revd. Zac Niringiye]*