

[*Knock, knock*] "Peace be to this place" the pastor declared as he walked into Wally's hospital room.

"Preacher," Wally shot straight up in his bed, "wh-wh-what are you doin' here? You can save your last rites. I'm no dyin' man. Lemme tell you, Dr. Kennedy's the best! He's gonna make me better than new. I'm gettin' outta here soon! You just watch!"

"Wally, that's not why I'm here," the pastor assured with a chuckle. "I'm just coming to see how you're doing."

"But you don't understand," Wally insisted, "Like I said, Dr. Kenney's the best! I mean, the man's a miracle-maker! With his help, why I'm gonna live to be one-hundred-and-twenty!"

Dipping his chin and arching his eyebrows, the pastor said with a smile, "Really? He's that good, huh?"

"Yeah, Dr. Kennedy, he can do anything! Why, I've even seen 'im turn a dying man around right quick. He was on his feet in no time. If Kennedy can do that, there's nothin' the man can't do! I'll be back to church before you know it. Just you wait an' see!" Wally finished with a cough.

Just then, they heard the sound of footsteps, then saw a shadow in the hall, and filling the doorframe there stood a man. Wally came alive at the sight of this new visitor—it was none other than Dr. Kennedy! "Great to see you, great to see you, Doctor!" Wally said with every ounce of enthusiasm he had in him. Dr. Kennedy stuck out his hand, and Wally shook it eagerly like he was sawing wood.

"Before you get too excited," Dr. Kennedy began, "Wally, I think you and I need to have a serious talk." The doctor then shot the pastor a glance, "Please excuse us, Reverend."

The pastor backed out of the room a moment while the two spoke privately. But as he waited outside, the pastor watched as with every word that fell from the doctor's mouth, so did Wally's face fall. His expression gradually went from one of optimism to a look of sheer disappointment.

When they were done, the doctor got up and left, giving the pastor a nod. He then went back into the room and found Wally to be suddenly very quiet. Wally looked like a man who'd just received his death sentence. Taking his place beside the bed, the pastor sat with Wally in silence.

Today as we pray "Thy kingdom come," I wonder if many of us aren't really praying "*My kingdom come*." For Wally, he was praying that heaven might come down to him in the form of a miracle cure—and he believed Dr. Kennedy was going to be just the guy to bring it. In Plato's *Republic*, we come to find out that for Socrates, his wish was for heaven to come in the form of a utopian society. There, everyone fits in where they belong within the perfect class structure, and the rulers are philosopher-kings whose wisdom can eliminate every problem of poverty and lack through the fair distribution of resources. Then, for the first century Jew—like in those in this morning's Gospel text—their prayer was that God's kingdom would be realized through the coming messiah. They thought he'd be the one to overthrow the oppressive Roman garrison, kick Herod off his vassal throne, and usher in a new era of peace and prosperity for God's people, just like it was under King David. But really, each in their own way—for Wally, for Plato, even for the first century Jew—their prayer wasn't so much "Thy kingdom come," as "*My kingdom come*."

We do that too, don't we? "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, *My kingdom come* . . ." Maybe like Wally, we think if only we get the right doctor with the right course of treatment, you and I will be immortal. Or like Plato, if only we elect the right government officials, we'll be able to solve all of society's problems. Or like the first century Jew, if we could only get the messiah we're looking for, who can give us what we want, life will be perfect! Or, if only . . . if only . . . if only . . . if only what—for you, what does the kingdom you're waiting for look like? Whatever it is, it's not "Thy kingdom come," it's really "*My kingdom come*."

But today as we're reminded how the Lord's Prayer really goes, we find Jesus putting up His hands and saying, "Uh-uh." Today He's holding His ground, refusing to let us pray like that. Today Jesus shakes His head no when He hears such talk. "Not 'My kingdom come,'" He says. "*Thy* kingdom come." I know it might make us cringe to have our hopes dashed like that! I know it hurts to not get our way! I know we might feel embarrassed when we realize we've been praying it all wrong this whole time!

But remember that old cliché, "Be careful what you wish for. You just might get it." Well, maybe it's good God doesn't always answer our prayers the way we want. Maybe it's good that God doesn't give us the kingdom we're looking for. After all, just imagine if He did. How would things turn out? Be honest—would it be enough, *really* enough . . . or would you still want more? If you got it . . . would you even be able to enjoy it? If God gave you the kingdom you're looking for . . . how would it go for the rest of us? Maybe it's only by grace that we don't always get what we want.

I can't help but think of Wally, a normal guy, who just wants what anyone would want—more time. He's very sick and hasn't got much of it left. At first, it sure seemed like Dr. Kennedy could be God's instrument of health and healing for him. But after getting back the test results, and examining the options, there's just not much anymore the good doctor can do for him. So, it's no wonder Wally's devastated when his kingdom doesn't come.

But what if God did answer Wally's prayer, what if God gave him more time? What if God gave him so much time, in fact, Wally got an infinite number of years—immortality without end—what then? Well, the Bible tells us what. Back in Genesis, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, God found Himself with a similar situation on His hands. Pacing around the room, God says to Himself, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." You and I might've thought Adam and Eve were kicked out of Eden just as some sort of punishment, like they were sent to their rooms or something. But as it turns out, it's nothing less than an act of pure grace on God's part. See, if He let them stay and eat from the Tree of Life—or for our purposes, the Tree of Immortality—then they would live forever sure, but live forever in their sin.

Now keep in mind it's sin that spoils everything and makes life miserable, so tell me, does that really sound like living to you? Forever living in a sinful world, trapped in a sinner's body—how could anyone ever experience the fullness of God's kingdom that way? So, it sounds like Wally's prayer for life without end on this side of heaven would be more of a curse than a blessing—a living hell if you will. So maybe it's good that God doesn't give him the kingdom he wants. But instead, God gives him the kingdom he needs—another kingdom prepared for him, one without sin.

You see, the kingdoms you and I ask for are far too small. None of us has ever really dared to dream big enough. No, God's kingdom—the kingdom we're taught to pray for—is much bigger and much better than anything our tiny little imaginations could ever think up. When it comes to our kingdoms, the best we can do is throw money at a problem, but it can only be throwing good after bad, because it's nothing more than putting a band aid on a bullet wound. Because none of our solutions ever really addresses the bigger issue—all we're ever doing is focusing on the little symptoms. But if anything's not right out *there* in the world, it's only because of what's not right in *here*—sin. It's no wonder Jesus says today, "The kingdom of God isn't coming in ways that can be observed, like, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!'" No, the kingdom addresses what can't be seen—our hearts. And that's a fix that none of our kingdoms can ever provide.

So, if we've really been praying the Lord's Prayer all wrong this whole time, saying "Thy kingdom come" when we really mean "My kingdom come," then I guess we're all in trouble. No wonder His kingdom hasn't come yet, that we still can't say, "Look, here it is!" or "There!" So, what do we do now? Well, I love Luther's answer in his Explanation to the Second Petition. He says "The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray that it might come to us also"—did you hear that? It comes whether or not we've been praying for the right thing!

And indeed it does . . . in the person of Jesus Christ. You see, the kingdom of God isn't so much a place as it is a person. Just like home wouldn't be the same without your loved ones there, heaven is only heaven because of God. And in Jesus, we get none other than heaven with two legs; He is God's kingdom on the go. That's why He says, you can't observe it here, or there, or anywhere, "for behold," He says in today's Gospel, "the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." In Him, it's right under our noses, staring us in the face.

That's why with every blind man who can see, every leper who is cleansed, every mute who can speak, every deaf person who can hear, every lame man who can walk, everyone who is raised from the dead, every demon who is cast out, every sinner and tax collector that is called to be a disciple, the kingdom of God is breaking open on earth. No more divide, no separation. The kingdom of God is at hand! In Jesus, it draws near!

But nowhere do we see that more than on the cross. There, even in the darkness and the death of Calvary, the light of heaven shines brightest. Because for you and me, that is where "Thy kingdom come." When Christ's flesh is pierced, God's salvation bursts through. With the flow of blood, God's grace pours out lavishly on the world. With His last groaning sigh, God ultimately declares His full and free forgiveness of sins to all of you. In our Savior Jesus Christ "Thy kingdom come." He is God's dream for us come true. Jesus answers the Lord's Prayer and brings to us a kingdom beyond our wildest imagination. A kingdom that actually addresses the real problem and embraces us with a real solution.

And that kingdom still draws near. It is, as Jesus said, wherever He is. In Christ, heaven is always open, spilling forth with abundant blessing. Forgiveness, life, and salvation are once again on the move. Just ask Wally.

After a long pause, Wally's eyes met those of his pastor. At first he looked despondent after hearing his physician's news. But having had a moment, he now looked to his pastor for some Good News from his Great Physician. Immediately, the pastor knew what to do. Opening up his hymnal to the right page, he set it aside. Then he reached for his Communion kit, and carefully, quietly put out the little chalice . . . then poured some wine into it . . . next the paten . . . and placed a wafer on it. Clearing his throat, he began the liturgy.

By Word and Sacrament—by Christ, the Word made flesh, who offers that same flesh and blood in bread and wine—Wally received the kingdom. That day, it came to him, bursting wide with rich gifts carrying him into eternal life, giving him a kingdom even greater than the one he was asking for. And today, for you . . . here, now . . . God answers your prayers better than you know how to ask. "Thy kingdom come."