



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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THE BIG STORY, Part 2

February 15, 2009

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~ Scripture: Matthew 6:10 ~

INTRODUCTION

Every Sunday, we close our prayer with these words: “*Our Father in heaven, hallowed by Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*” [Matthew 6:9-10]

I was taught *The Lord’s Prayer* as a young child. It was one of the first things I memorized growing up in Ohio at the church my grandfather took me to every Sunday. Its words are imprinted on my mind to this day.

But like everything else that has been committed to memory, you tend to repeat it over & over again and forget what you’re saying. It’s easy to go through the motions and miss the deeper meaning. To pray “*Your kingdom come, Your will be done*” is pretty dangerous if you don’t realize what that entails. Look at these phrases.

I. YOUR KINGDOM COME

To pray “*Your kingdom come*” is a pretty radical thing. When one kingdom is already established and another one is coming, one has to be removed. [ILLUSTRATION> Children of Israel taking over the Promised Land of Canaan.] That’s pretty revolutionary. Two kings cannot rule the same region. There cannot be two laws of the land. . .two sheriffs of the same town.

Yet some Christians view the kingdom as being some far off place (i.e.: heaven)—our eventual reward for salvation. They have little sense of God’s desire to redeem this world. Yet from the beginning:

- Jesus preached: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” [Matthew 4:17]
- When He sent out the 12 (later the 70), He instructed them to go preach the exact same message: “The kingdom of heaven is near.” [Matthew 10:7]

Clearly, Jesus came to earth to establish His kingdom here—amidst all the poverty, cruelty, and ignorance —and to show us how to live according to kingdom values.

So, when we pray “*Your kingdom come*”, we’re talking *here & now*. . .not *now & then*.

II. YOUR WILL BE DONE

When we pray “*Your will be done*”, we’re saying “I want what you want!” Does God want poverty, injustice, economic disparity? Does He want the greed and self-centeredness that dominate most relationships (e.g.: interpersonal, business, international)?

Yet much of our time in prayer is spent trying to convince God to do our will. We want what we want. . .and we want God to want what we want. But the prayer is NOT “*My kingdom come, My will be done*”. . .BUT “*Your kingdom come, Your will be done*” — because that’s where the kingdom of God is (i.e.: where God’s will is being done).

The kingdom of God is not a geographical place on the map. Once when Jesus was dialoguing with the Pharisees, he made this statement: “*The Kingdom of God is within (or, among) you*” [Luke 17:21]. It is where God is really in charge. . .where what He wants to happen really does happen within us and between us. It’s where love / joy / peace / patience / kindness / goodness / gentleness / faithfulness / self-control really do prevail. It’s where

emotions are healed, relationships are made right, sorrow-shame-pain are traded for hope-wholeness-healing.

What's more—and this is Good News—we can enter into it now (before we die). It can be.....

III. ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

When we pray that prayer, we're saying: "*Bring up there down here!*" Does that mean we have "*heaven on earth*"? Look around, there's not much of that. But, to the degree that Christ is Lord and His will is known & being done, we do have some of heaven on earth.

Now, here's my sermon in a sentence: **God uses us to answer this prayer!** He not only invites us into a redemptive relationship with Himself, but He invites us to join Him in what He is doing here on earth—in the here & now.

And that's a clarion call to MISSION. That's why we have a Missions & Evangelism Cell in our church. We need both. We need **evangelism**—which is sharing our faith using words whenever anybody "asks us to give the reason for the hope that is within us" [I Peter 3:15]. We also need **missions**—which is sharing our faith not only by what we say, but by what we do (our actions).

If you'll refer to the Circle Presentation from last week (cf. **bulletin insert**).....

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right)

Mission is the 4th circle==*sent together to heal. Restored for better* is the 3rd circle. . .

That's the part in the story where Jesus is sent to die for the penalty of my sins so I might go to heaven when I die. But we don't stop there. We move on to the 4th circle. That's part of the package; it's a package deal. We are restored in Him so that He can turn around and use us to heal the planet. . .and consequently bring on the kingdom of God.

Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God (i.e.: "*The time has come, the kingdom of God is near*")—a very present, this-worldly kind of message. He said more about this than anything else (e.g.: afterlife / morality / money / legalism). He wanted the kingdom to come in the here & now (not just at the end of time). He had in mind a *new* kind of people with a *new* kind of relationship with God & with each other, living out a *new* kind of life & and a *new* set of values—full of love for God and love for neighbor. This would go a long way toward bringing healing to the planet.

Not that all things are right (nor will they ever be). There's coming a time when all systems, relationships, and individuals will be fully restored. But in the meantime, we're part of a *bigger story*. We saw last week how that could be articulated (and how we could use that model to articulate our faith).ⁱ Now we are going to push it a step further. LISTENⁱⁱ.

So, we're sent together to heal the planet. . .to help bring His kingdom to earth. . .to see that His will gets done on earth (as it is in heaven). That's a pretty tall order. We can't afford to jump to the 4th circle without going through the 3rd circle. It's too much. Since we're called to some-thing so much greater than ourselves, we need Someone more powerful to rely on—whether we're fighting something *out there* (a cause, an injustice) or something *in here* (in our own hearts).

But neither do we remain in the security, the shelter of the 3rd circle. That won't get the world healed. Jesus wants us in the 4th circle, involved in things like:

- Protecting & healing the environment;
- Fighting injustice / inequality / oppression;
- Reducing violence / protecting life / making the world a safer, more hospitable place.

I would like to take a few minutes to share with you some of what I am aware of that we here at Dexter UMC are involved in in terms of doing God's work in the greater community.

Of course we are heavily involved in discipling people in (into) their walk with Jesus Christ. . . men's ministry. . . women's ministry. . . new buildings. . . new people. But I wonder if you're aware of all **the mission work** that goes on. Some of it is care-related, some outreach-oriented, some community-building, some healing-intentioned. Some is done by groups in the church, some by groups outside the church; there are individuals working through

some channel within the church, individuals working in ministries of passion & compassion not necessarily sponsored by DUMC. I know I'm going to leave out some (I apologize!), but here's a sampling:

- About 30-40 people walk the *CROP Walk*. Last year \$15k+ was raised; we're 3rd in the state again.
- Work teams helped (and will help) build a *Good News House* in Ypsi under Habitat for Humanity. Don't forget the *Silent Auction and Italian Dinner* to raise money for this on Saturday, February 28th.
- A team of a dozen travels every year to *Red Bird Mission* in KY (this year, end of April).
- Several volunteers raise money, prepare and take lunches for an entire week in July to *Grace UMC in Dearborn* (for a day program they run in the summer for 70-80+ kids).
- 2-3 times a year a group goes into inner-city Detroit to cook and serve a meal at *Cass Community Social Services*.
- Volunteers serve three weeks a year at *Alpha House* (homeless shelter for families nearby).
- Our middle school and high school youth each go to Memphis for a week of *S.O.S. (Service Over Self)* in the summer.
- We supply lots of food for the food pantry here in Dexter through our *Hunger Hamper*.
- There are the *coffee sales* (3rd Sunday of each month), the proceeds of which benefit impoverished people in 3rd world countries.
- We *support missionaries* with our giving and praying (e.g.: Ben in Italy, Katie and Chloe to Haiti, and many more).
- We send \$1000s for things like the *Black College Fund, Native American ministries, World Children's Fund, Peace with Justice* and *UMCOR* (relief work).
- We received a substantial offering for *Brother Luc's orphanage in Haiti* back in July.
- Several of us ride 300 miles on our bicycles in July every summer for the *Make-A-Wish Foundation*.
- The leadership for the annual *Cancer Walk* comes from our congregation; several have walked or participated in some way.
- Same with *Rebuilding Together* (AKA *Christmas in April*).
- I serve on the board of *Faith in Action* (Chelsea) + Matt serves on the board of the newly formed *UMC Retirement Communities* group that is building *The Cedars of Dexter*.
- Matt & Leigh and other families have taken care of small *medically-challenged children* from other countries for months at a time in their homes.
- *Stephen Ministry* helps a lot of people who are going through hard times.
- Our church hosts a women's *AA-type group* (weekly).
- Our youth center, *The Edge* (built by us), is a drawing card for the youth of Dexter who don't have anywhere to go.

One of the things I love about this church is that we are a bunch of *doers*. We don't sit around and talk about it much; we just do it. And we could be doing more. But the point is, this is Kingdom work! This is work that is helping to heal the planet; it is getting His will done on earth as it is in heaven.

SOME NEXT STEPS

ONE, JOIN HIS MISSION. Come alongside others, and do your part. What's that? It could be anything from starting to recycle to volunteering in one of our ministries (cf. *Dexter UMC At-A-Glance*). Maybe it's spending some time under the banners in The Atrium, asking God to direct you. . .to put a love on your heart for others. . .to give you a passion. Talk to one of the mission leaders and find out what they're all about. Talk to one of us pastors.

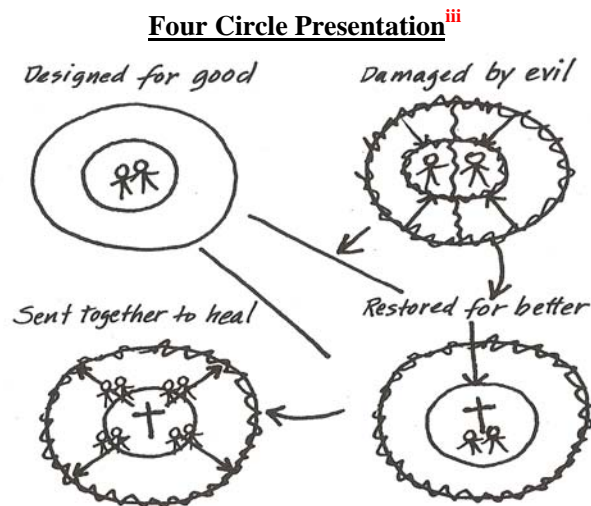
TWO, JOIN HIS COMMUNITY. Get into an Adult Ed. Class, a small group, a Bible study. Look for a group of believers who know you and can support you. True faith is personal AND it is interpersonal.

THREE, JOIN HIS LIFE. See yourself as being on a journey to become more like Jesus. Let Him take charge of your life. Trust Him. Ask for forgiveness for the ways you have not lived out His design. Don't try to make up for lost time. Just take it from here; rather, let Him take you from here. Make *prayer* a regular part of your routine (as you talk to Him, He will talk to you); also the study of *His Word*.

CONCLUSION

Jesus is inviting each of you to new life in Him...and...to join His healing movement for the planet (called the kingdom of God). As we saw in the video, the followers of Jesus have a good track record of leaving behind the kind of good that lasts. You can too, but you need to get to the 4th circle by first going through the 3rd circle. Then you will be doing good work / supporting good causes with God at the center and with His people all around. What an unbeatable combination!

PRAY: Lord, many of us have been chasing our own dreams and living for ourselves. It has hurt our own souls and neglected the needs of others & the world You love so dearly. Please forgive us—each one individually—as we wait upon You in this moment. Help us each one, if we haven't already, to give you leadership in our life. . .and allow You to align us with Your purposes. Make us agents of healing for the world, with your people. In Jesus' name...



ⁱ If you missed the video with the *Four Circle Presentation*, go to our website and under [How to Share Christ's Love](#) click on "The Big Story, Part I". It's on the home page. The four circles are also shown at the end of this manuscript.

ⁱⁱ This is *Part 2* of "The Big Story", which is also linked to our website at the same location.

ⁱⁱⁱ From *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In* by James Choung (published by InterVarsity Press in April 2008), p. 171.