

“Our God Is Good”

- I. Introduction: Each time we say the Lord’s Prayer, we say to God “. . . Thy Kingdom come.” This evening we’re going to compare two different kinds of kings who have two very different kinds of kingdoms. The first king is very grand, but he’s also quite foolish and silly. He and the people in his kingdom pretend to see things that don’t exist. The second king is quite different. He is loving and wise and the people in his Kingdom see things very clearly. In fact, this good king helps his people to know the truth fully.
- II. I’m sure most of you know the story of The Emperor’s New Clothes. This emperor was very self-centered.

All he thought about was getting new clothes. He had a new coat for every hour of the day. And he rode around constantly in his carriage showing off his clothes. He never worried about his people and what they needed. One day he commanded that his tailors make him a magic suit that would allow him to know everything. Two men tricked him into believing that they’d made such a suit. But, they said, only very smart people would see it. Do you remember what happened? They pretended to make a suit, and the king pretended to see it because he didn’t want others to think he wasn’t smart. He paraded through the city in his new pretend suit. His subjects pretended to see the suit too – saying “Oh, it’s beautiful!” Finally, a child in the crowd cried “But he has nothing on!” Even though the king knew the child was telling the truth, he went on with the parade, pretending.

The king’s problem was that he cared excessively about himself. When we think only about ourselves, we can become confused about what is true and real, and what is important. This king, in his self-centeredness, encouraged a pretend kingdom where he and his people ignored and did not speak the truth.

- III. Now the second King is very different from the emperor. This King is God, our Father. In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells us that we can trust this King completely. This King loves us deeply and has prepared a place for us in His Kingdom. That is why we are to pray: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”
 - A. Now it is very important to understand that as this prayer emphasizes, God’s Kingdom is not only in the future, it is in the here and now, and it is full of blessings and surprises in the present time. I was reminded of how immediate God’s kingdom can be while on vacation several years ago near Charleston, SC. We were visiting John and Kathy, Episcopal lay missionaries to the Dominican Republic. Kathy and John had heard God call them to the mission field while

receiving communion at their parish in South Carolina. The contemporary song they were singing during communion that day was “Here I am Lord. . .” Kathy, John, and their son went to a practically abandoned church camp in the mountains of the Dominican Republic. They repaired and cared for that camp and began to minister to very poor Dominicans in an impoverished squatters village nearby. While I was in SC we took two mission trips to that camp. Together we helped build a new home in that village and taught a vacation Bible School to over 100 Dominican children. We had powerful spiritual experiences in that barrio.

Peg and I moved on to a new ministry in Tennessee and had heard that John had become very ill and had had to come home to South Carolina. John had been diagnosed with multiple myeloma, and his prognosis was guarded. John and Cathy had returned home to John’s Island in South Carolina. While on vacation, Peg and I visited them. I had been told before the visit that John’s diagnosis came during a meeting of Episcopal missionaries in Mexico, that his diagnosis had prevented them from returning to the DR, and that they were struggling with having enough to support themselves. These details had focused me on John’s story, his unfinished work, and the sadness of it all.

In my focus on my sadness about their circumstances, I lost sight of the fact that God’s Kingdom is in the here and now and that God was providing for John and Cathy now, even as He had in the past, and even as He will in the future. You see, God is good, and we can count on that. For over three hours, John and Cathy recounted the many ways that God had been preparing them for this period and meeting their needs. For example, they had been praying for God’s guidance about buying property in the DR, and felt led not to do so. Now they look back and see that that would have tied up their resources and limited their mobility. John had considered not going to the missionary conference in Mexico because he was feeling badly, but prayerfully decided to go. While there, connections were made for him to see specialists who could diagnose his condition and make sure that what he needed was quickly available. A young woman who had planned to work with them as a missionary that summer, upon hearing about their situation, decided to go the DR, brought a friend, and packed up all of John and Cathy’s belongings, and then returned to South Carolina to help them get situated.

Their home, which had been rented, was in disrepair. God sent two mission teams to repair their home and put in air conditioning so that John could be comfortable as he underwent treatment. This is fitting, because one of the activities they had committed to in the Dominican Republic was to help people build and repair their homes so that they could be safe and comfortable. And God had provided donations to support the mission teams’ repair work and provided Cathy two part time jobs very near their home so that she could earn income while still being close and available to John.

- B. Disclaimer: Now before we go any further, I’d like to make a disclaimer. God did not inflict illness upon John as a test or a punishment. We live in a world that is often challenging and hard. As Rabbi Kushner (1981) wrote “Bad things happen to good people.” But we know God walks with us through the painful times in our lives. In Luke, Jesus reminded the disciples that when they asked God for help, God would respond. That is because God is trust-

worthy and loving. God would not give them a snake instead of a fish or a scorpion instead of an egg. We can trust God to give us what we need as we face life's challenges; God can and will redeem every aspect of our lives if we allow Him to do so.

C. Our God's Kingdom is also a place in which the truth can be told. Cathy talked with us about her feelings around John's diagnosis and described going to their church with two friends to talk with God about how she felt. God joined her there, listened to her even in her frustration, and gave her a sense of peace. She was reminded that God was providing what they needed and that God is good. Unlike the emperor who ruled a kingdom where everyone pretended, our God's Kingdom is based on truth. And when God speaks to us, God always tells us what is true. There is no pretending, no deception. Cathy's deep faith in God's goodness helped her to move beyond her own feelings and see God's love at work in her life in spite of John's illness.

IV. Conclusion. Our God is good. Our experience on this trip to see our friends Kathy and John was not what we had expected. Instead of despair, we found hope and faith in what God was doing in their lives. In fact we found deep faith in God's immediate presence in their lives – making sure they had a home, sufficient income, medical care, and a community to support them. Just as they had in the Dominican Republic, our friends were living lives of deep faith. Now having deep faith does not always mean that we'll feel good or that events will unfold as we would like them to. What deep faith does allow is the certainty of knowing that God loves us deeply and wants the best for us. Through our deep faith we can know peace in spite of external circumstances.

What God asks is that we really mean it when we pray "your will be done" -- that we mean it whether it coincides with our will or not. When we give God authority in our lives, we are better able to see how fully God loves us and acts in our interest. Again our spiritual well-being is based upon our relationship with God, not the circumstances of our lives. My visit with John and Cathy was humbling – I had come to support them, but instead God had used them to bless and to minister to me. God used them to remind us that God's love for us can be trusted and that God's Kingdom has already begun. God is good. Thanks be to God. Amen.