

## On Earth as It Is In Heaven

**Acts 1:1-5**  
**May 29, 2022**

**First Presbyterian Church**  
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The following is from a document titled The Lord's Prayer in Dialogue. The person praying begins with, "Our Father which art in heaven..." "Yes?" says a voice. "Don't interrupt me," says the person. "I'm praying." But you called me. Called you? I didn't call you. I'm praying. And he continues, "Our Father which art in heaven." There you did it again. Did what? Called me. You said, "Our Father which art in heaven." Here I am. What's on your mind? But I didn't mean anything by it. I was, you know, just saying my prayers. I always say the Lord's Prayer. It makes me feel good, kind of like getting a task done. All right," says God. "Go on." So he continues, saying, "Hallowed be thy name..." and they talk about the meaning of Hallowed, or Holy. And then he comes to, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." "Do you really mean that?" asks God. Sure, why not? What are you doing about it? Doing? Nothing, I guess. I just think it would be kind of neat if you got control of everything down here like you have up there. Have I got control of you? Well, I go to church. That isn't what I asked you. What about the way you belittle other people and spend your money only on yourself? Stop picking on me! I'm just as good as the rest of those people at church. Excuse me. I thought you were praying for my will to be done. If that is to happen, it will have to start with the ones who are praying for it. Like you. Yes, If God's will is to be done on earth as it is in heaven, it will have to start with the ones praying for it, like us.

Today is Ascension Sunday, the day we celebrate Jesus ascending into heaven, seated on the right hand of God the Father. The ascension in today's New Testament lesson is a response to anyone asking themselves, "What's going on here What's going on these days? Where is God in all of this?" And by "this," I mean all of this – the world we live in as it is, the world coming into being through the Holy Spirit, and the world as it will be with the return of Jesus.

In today's New Testament lesson, we are given a common vision, a vision that ties all these worldly times together – what's here and now, what's taking shape, and what's to come. The vision that ties all this together is what Jesus envisioned when he spoke of the Kingdom of God. After Jesus was crucified, "after his suffering," as Acts says, "he presented himself alive to (the disciples) ..., appearing to them over the course of 40 days and speaking about the Kingdom of God."

Throughout the gospels, Jesus told the disciples – and us – that the Kingdom of God is within you, within the midst of you (Luke 17:21). He said the Kingdom of God is good news (Luke 8:1). It's the transformation of the world from a spirit of brutality and war to God's Spirit of love and peace.

The disciples spent three years listening to Jesus speak of this vision – in both word and deed – and here at his ascension, the disciples ask him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom...?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.” You see, the disciples are looking for immediate results, we want immediate results, pleading with God, “Is this the time when you will restore” us and all the world as it should be? When, Lord; how long must we wait? And what Jesus says in response is: There are things which you cannot know, things that only God the Father knows. That’s hard for us. We want to know; we want to be in control. Things would be much better if we were in control.

No. Not true. Giving us power over good and evil, right and wrong – that’s not in God’s plan. Do you know how I know that? Look at the things we do control. They’re not getting that much better. In many ways, as we all know, things are getting worse. The more we try to take control, the worse things seem to get. What we really need is for Jesus to be in control. And you know that. The question is: How do have Jesus take control?

Well, Acts tells us that as Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples stood there “gazing up towards heaven....” and “Suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’”

Like the disciples, we stand around looking for Jesus, praying for Jesus, waiting for Jesus, with hope upon hope that Jesus will return to set all things right. And what we are told is: Don’t stand there looking to heaven for the solution. Jesus will come, the solution will come in the same way as before, which is through a selfless act of love so powerful as to overcome death and evil.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ... And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.” When staring evil in the face, don’t look to heaven for Jesus. Rather, look for Jesus here on earth, in the power of the Holy Spirit. “... You will receive power,” says Jesus, “when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

The only way God’s vision comes into sharper focus is if we continue to be witnesses, witnesses in word and deed to all that Jesus teaches, all that Jesus embodies. Jesus came into the world shining forth the light of God, overcoming death and evil. Jesus ascended into heaven, sending the Holy Spirit upon us, that we might shine light into the darkness. That’s what the kingdom of God is all about – shining light into the darkness of this world.

Look to that light now and let it guide you in all that you say and all that you do, in the discussions you make. Let the light of Jesus Christ shine forth, the light of creation, the light of redemption, the "light (that) shines in the "darkness and the darkness did not overcome it," cannot overcome it (John 1:5).

As bad as things get, the kingdom of God is still within us, within the midst of us. And it is a kingdom of peace and love, a kingdom of hope and life, a kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

### **PASTORAL PRAYER**

God our shelter, hold us under the shadow of your wings as we bow before you in grief and pain. We pray for each family in Uvalde, TX, who has lost a beloved child, a parent, a friend; we pray for those who have witnessed horror, and are wounded in body or spirit, for each of them is a child made in your image.

We pray for ourselves, that we will find strength to support the brokenhearted, grace to find our way in the darkness of grief, anger and loss; light to sense your presence, even in the valley of the shadow of death. Restore our hopes, our hearts, even as we weep with grief and tremble with anger. Fill us, your wounded, willing people, with a peace that passes understanding, the courage to nurture healing and hope, and the willingness to bear the Christ light, even in these days of shadow.

We pray also, O Lord, for the individuals and families of First Church battling illness and disease, recovering from injury and surgery, and preparing for surgery. We pray all this in the powerful, faithful and compassionate Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

*\*Includes a prayer written by Rev. Laurie Kraus, associate mission director of compassion, peace and justice of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*