**“Thy Kin-dom Come”**

**Isaiah 65: 17-25; Rev. G. Scott Turnbrook; Northwood United Church; November 13, 2016**

Every Sunday, we pray the Lord’s Prayer ~ we pray “thy kingdom come”. Oh how much we truly want for that kingdom to come at times! For me, I was praying for it at a very odd funeral which I officiated many years ago in Prince George, BC. It was the first of several RCMP tazer deaths which would lead to a full investigation into the use of this weapon. Clayton Willie was high on cocaine ~ a drug that makes your heart race, and as this young man was attempting to avoid arrest the officer was forced to fire his tazer gun. The combination of the drugs and the powerful effects of the tazer was simply too much for this young man’s heart. He suffered a heart attack and was pronounced dead on arrival at the Hospital. In the aftermath of this tragedy we gathered for a funeral. As I surveyed the congregation, I saw many people lamenting a death that should not have been: a tragedy resulting from living life gone horribly wrong and I prayed for “thy kingdom to come” on that day. I can still remember the sounds: a weeping girlfriend, sobbing parents, crying brothers and sisters, even Hells angels dressed in their leather jackets ~ ‘their colours’ wearing sunglasses to cover up their tears ~ yes even these big men cry. Oh Lord, when will “thy kingdom come” I prayed. We had gathered to remember the life of a child of God, someone’s son, someone’s partner, someone’s friend…a child of God. Yet at the same time, it was someone who had made some horribly bad choices in his life. As you know, each funeral service has a reading or two that forms the central focus of hope for all who gather. And Isaiah 65 was the reading that I selected. For as we gathered and we were struck by the harsh realities of this young man’s life, there was also God’s hope of a new heaven and a new earth which would come about one day when Isaiah wrote: “I am about to create new heavens and a new earth…” I selected that reading because this passage is all about reminding us / reassuring us that even when life has gone horribly astray that one day … one day…there will be hope … there will be restoration… there be redemption…there will be a new heaven and a new earth. One day “thy kingdom truly will come!”

This of course, is not new. God’s children have been profoundly disobedient throughout the ages of time ~ life goes horribly astray ~ and God’s children have sat on the other side of their actions praying for “thy kingdom to come” in many different settings. In the Judeo-Christian tradition it goes all the way back to Adam and Eve and the apple in Genesis 3 when we began separating from God’s complete presence in our lives. Scripture records a litany of narratives about creation yearning to return home to that deeply intimate connection represented in the mythical Garden time. Times of separation from God are the narratives of lament in our lives and we see this separation reflected in times of captivity in places Egypt, and like ~ as recorded in this morning’s text ~ in the time of captivity in Babylon. Babylonian captivity was a time of tremendous sadness and loss for the Israelites. This period of captivity began in 605 BCE when King Nebuchadnezzar conquered the Israelites. They suffered in captivity for many generations until Cyrus the Great, King of Persia, conquered Babylon in 539 BCE and allowed the exiles to return home. The text speaks about the “former things” saying “the former things will not be remembered or come to mind, but be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating”. The reference is to this time of deep separation from God that had developed and led to their fall. The Israelites had lost their connection with God, with one another and ~ being a smaller / weaker community to start with ~ they were easy prey for the attacking Babylonians. They lay in Babylonian bondage for 66 years! They lived as slaves. Generations of children were born as slaves. Generations of adults died as slaves. They lamented the past; they wept; they sang “by the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept when we remembered Zion” (Ps. 139). They yearned for “thy kingdom to come”. This was a profoundly hard period of their history ~ guilt, sadness, and longing were on their hearts. And so, whenever we read Isaiah 65 in worship, we read it as a reminder, as a corrective, that calls us back into faithful living. We read this passage as a source of hope, as a prayer for “thy kingdom to truly come” as it did for the Israelites, and as it does for each of us.

How about you? Can you relate to a time of Babylonian captivity in your life? Have there been times when your life has come completely undone and you have found yourself yearning for a time when all will be restored, when all will be forgiven, when “thy kingdom [will truly] come”? For me, when I have the honour of holding a baby, I am always mindful of the pain and suffering that have been endured, that led up to this child’s birth ~ I think about the sacrifices a couple makes to create space in their family for a child, 9 months of pregnancy, and, of course, the marathon of childbirth ~ yet…this child comes and we hold a miracle in our hands and see them grow and form and we know that this is the work of God ~ for the work of God is to have “thy kingdom come” as this gift of new life reminds us of God’s creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

As you may have heard, we have just started a new group at Northwood for people who have suffered the loss of a loved one. Following our planning gathering last week, what we are calling “The Grief Support Group” will commence meeting on the first Monday of each month, starting on December 5th. And people will gather ~ going through something that is completely natural, but also so deeply painful and challenging…walking through their own unique version of the grief journey as they say goodbye to a loved one and beginning to put the pieces back together of their life. I remember a wedding service I did for a couple from a former congregation. Two seniors ~ members of a former church ~ both who had lost their partner. Both had healed and, over time, each had found a place in their heart for a new person to share love with. It was an interesting way to meet ~ I always love asking couples ‘their story’. But in this case, I knew theirs. They sang in the church choir together, coffee led to conversation, and conversation led to … a new life together in marriage. (sometimes … more goes on in the choir than just great singing!) And they found the next step of their journey. A chance to come together in a way that was a surprise to each of them! For them, it was their version of a new heaven and a new earth. I remember visiting their home after the wedding and having them proudly show me a glass hutch. It had two sections: one had memories from her life with her first husband and the other section had memories from his family that was before. “Thy Kingdom come” for them ~ not the future they had originally envisioned. Yet it was a future where God brought joy and peace. Sometimes we never truly know the way the future will unfold, yet our faith story is one of God’s dream to bring restoration and healing, to birth a new heaven and a new earth, for “thy kingdom to truly come”!

These, of course, are ‘nice stories’… ‘happy endings’ with a nice conclusion. But, as we know, most of life is lived in the ‘in-between’ times. In those times when we, so desperately, pray for “thy kingdom to come”. So much of life occurs during the times in which we feel like we live in captivity in Babylon; when we live in the times when life is falling apart; in the times when life feels so uncertain. That is when I met the family of Clayton Willie, who had just died while evading police capture and they wondered when “thy kingdom would come” for them. This is where we sit after a loss when we are numb and we try to plan a funeral service and we wonder when “thy kingdom come”. This is where we sit when family life gets challenging and uncertain and we wonder when “thy kingdom come”. This is the story of where so much of life is truly lived. Where we yearn for hope, for “thy kingdom come”.

I so appreciate the conclusion of this passage. It is so regularly quoted that you likely can recite it and visualize it. The time when “thy kingdom comes” will be when (can you picture it) “the wolf and the lamb feed together, when the lion eats straw like the ox…” It is a time when predator and prey become … family. There is an interesting movement being prompted within feminist theology which calls us to rethink the use of the language of ‘kingdom’. Kingdom implies kingship which, of course, is about power and dominance of one party over another. Feminist theology argues that the inauguration of the Kingdom of God is not about the shift of power from one dominant power ~ such as the rule of the Babylonian king over the Israelites being shifted over to God. The new heaven and earth is not about a stronger warrior God who would bring about freedom to the Israelites through the blood of the Babylonians. “Thy kingdom come” is a shifting from a system of hierarchy and ‘power over’ way of being to that of a unity and a kinship of being ‘with’. “Thy Kingdom come” is about the wolf and the lamb finding a new way to ‘be together’ ~ not as predator and prey ~ but as family ~ as kin. And so, what many of us are adopting today is a movement towards using the language of “kin” as they dream into what “thy kingdom come” would look like by calling it “thy kin-dom come”. Because that is truly the vision of God’s kingdom: not that of a warrior God who is stronger and would conquer all the other gods. But rather, “thy kin-dom come” is that vision of God’s king-om of us living as “kin”. “Thy kin-dom come” is about wolf and the lamb feeding together; it is about all God’s children being united in ways of hope. It is about us seeing a vision of God’s new heaven and new earth that is God’s dream and God’s delight.

I don’t know what challenges and struggles inform your living but I so appreciate the sense of hope in this passage. The “new heavens and new earth” offer a vision of life lived in abundance and longevity in a future time that God will, one day, bring. For the Israelites, it was a promise that they would be able ~ one day ~ enjoy the fruits of their labours: when they would “build houses and inhabit them; and plant vineyards and eat their fruit” And for us, it is a promise of a life that will be good one day, a day that is coming ~ sure as Sunday. A day of glory and hope and peace. A day of a new heaven and a new earth ~ a day when “thy kin-dom truly comes!” Amen.