

080413 Communion Sunday

“Worship and Prayer: For Thine Is The Kingdom and the Power and the Glory.Amen” ©

Rev. Seth D. Jones

John 4:5-26; Revelation 7:9-12

Today ends our exploration of the Lord’s Prayer, which I hope gives us a solid foundation to enter into the 10 Commandments. At the very beginning, I asked us to look at prayer as a discipline which allows us to become aware of the presence of the Lord in our lives and relationships, and the Lord’s Prayer as a way for us to become intentional about that desire to be closer to God. Today, we end with the phrase “*for thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen.*” This part of the Lord’s Prayer, if you notice in your Bible in Matthew 6 and in Luke, does not end with this phrase. If you pick up a King James bible, it does end with this phrase.

“*For thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory*” is what is called a ‘doxology’, which simply means a song or affirmation of praise to God. The phrase was probably added sometime in the second century as a way to end the Lord’s Prayer in a worship setting. We still use it today because of the value of tradition in worship.

Jesus tells the woman at the well,

“...the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23-24).

Jesus breaks down the traditional understandings of worship. Worship in truth and spirit means coming before God honestly, in gratitude and in expectation, not out of duty and rules. We become obedient to God not because of a desire to follow rules or out of fear of consequences, but because we know that obedience to God, trusting in God, is an outcome of our deepening relationship to God. The more we come to know God, the more we want to follow God.

Worship is where the Lord’s Prayer begins and ends.

We began with “*Our Father, who are in heaven, hallowed be thy name*” - an acknowledgment of to whom we pray. And we end the Lord’s Prayer with “*For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory. Amen*” - a singing of praise, a doxology, to the God to whom we pray.

We begin with the God who has given all things to us, including our salvation through his Son Jesus Christ, and we end by giving over all to the God who has given us all things.

The Lord’s Prayer leads us to worship and worship leads us to prayer. Deepening our relationship with God through prayer leads us to seek ways to love and praise God, which is worship. And participating in worship leads us to a more intentional prayer life.

I want to emphasize here once again what is one of the most important aspects of the Lord’s Prayer. Every part of it is in the plural. “*Our...us*”, not “*I...me*”. This tells us something profound:

when we pray this prayer alone, we are praying together. And when we pray this prayer together, we are praying for one another. Whether together or apart, we are praying with and for one another to God.

This ‘togetherness’ of the Lord’s Prayer makes me think of one aspect of our worship that creates some difficulty for people. When we come into the worship space at Rockland Congregational Church many of you are

excited to see one another and you talk right up until I start talking. Some of you are bothered by this and believe the beginning of worship should be solemn, silent and quiet. I don't know if this is helpful, but you both are 'right', if there can be such a thing when talking about how we worship together.

Before I say anything else, let's remember who leads our worship. Jesus Christ is the head of the church and the true leader of worship. Not me, not you, none of us. We gather together because Christ has invited us, because Christ welcomes us, because Christ calls us to wait together for his presence among us, and we are called to do this with one another, whether visitor or member, friend or stranger, black or white, rich or poor, gay or straight, male or female.

Now, both of you are right, whether you want to speak to one another during the music at the beginning or you want silence. The reason you are both right is the way you come into the space. If I can be so bold, I will tell you the way you are coming into worship. You are entering Rockland Congregational Church with expectancy.

You expect to see friends. You expect to see people you have not seen all week. You expect to be met by friends, by family, by music, by sharing this experience for the next hour or hour and fifteen minutes with one another. The worship experience is defined by an expectancy of seeing one another. The same is true of our prayer experience. We expect a relationship with God, a conscious and full awareness of the presence of God in our lives.

What I would like to suggest to you is that the expectancy we experience as we come together to worship is really a "*Holy Expectancy*"¹. We, ideally, have learned throughout the week, that we have met God in our experiences and in our relationships and in our prayer time and devotional time. And now, here, in this place, we expect to meet God in the sharing of music, Scripture, bread and wine, fellowship and prayer together, with those with whom we have covenanted together, made promises together, that we will "*walk together in the ways of the Lord*".

For those of you who walk into church on Sunday morning excited to speak with people, I would suggest what is actually happening is a Holy Expectancy that you will find out how God has been active in the lives of those whom you see on Sunday morning and that you will once again see God in the story of others and in the telling of your story of the past week. For those of you who come into church on Sunday morning who want silence, I would suggest what is actually happening is a Holy Expectancy that God will make God's self known to you in the music and focus of your soul and mind on the experience of worshipping together.

Do I mean to suggest all of you who are talking to stop while the music is playing? No.

And do I mean for all of you who are silent to start talking to your neighbors during the beginning of the service? No.

Instead, all of us need to make more conscious what we are already doing - entering worship together with a Holy Expectancy that God will meet us here, again, because God has also met us in the world during the week. Here, together, we share that experience. Now, the silence of others welcomes the deep and profound experience of God's personal attention to each of us; and the distraction of others speaking about their week welcomes the deep and profound experience of God's presence in our relationship to one another.

¹ This idea comes from Richard Foster in his book *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. HarperSanFrancisco. San Francisco, CA. © 1978. Chapter 11 outlines the "Discipline of Worship" in this excellent work.

See, one of the great secrets, I think, of the faith is this: the deeper our relationship with one another becomes and the more we recognize our 'togetherness' in all Godly things, the more we understand our individuality, the more we become the person - the singular, profoundly complex, individual person God intends us to be. We are, in our commitment to follow God and Christ, not trying to worship or 'get better' at things. Instead, we are surrounded by worship and prayer and we become increasingly aware of how our lives are defined by what the Lord has provided for us in that worship and prayer. This is true whether you come here expecting silence or come here expecting reunion with friends.

An intentional and deep prayer life is a deep and intentional life of worship, and worship deepens our prayer life. Our spiritual lives, indeed our entire life, become defined by the Holy Expectancy that worship and prayer engender. Willard Sperry, who was dean of Harvard Divinity School from 1922-1953, and a good Congregationalist, said, "*Worship is a deliberate and disciplined adventure in reality.*" This is because the foundation of our lives becomes God and God alone. Reality is defined by God and the way we develop our understanding of that reality are through the ways which put us into direct relationship with God - prayer and worship. As our relationship with God deepens, we expect God to be present in our lives and in the lives of others. We begin to look for it. We have a Holy Expectancy toward life itself. We live a life of anticipation that God will find us wherever we are. And we begin to understand that we can only truly know the meaning of our life with God if we do it together.

We anticipate the God in the present as we come together to worship and fellowship together, and we anticipate God in the future when we stand in the fullness of Christ, as Revelation describes:

"...a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands."

That is you. That is us. Our worship and prayer here looks like the worship and prayer when we all stand together with God and Christ, when the curtain between the living and the dead, the heavens and the earth, between and God is torn in half and we stand face to face with one another and with God.

We get a taste of this in our relationship with Christ, because this is what Jesus does for us on the Cross and in the Resurrection. Jesus shows us that, through him, we can worship God in truth and in spirit in such a way that we get a foretaste of what it means to live without interference with God.

We should expect that kind of relationship with God. We should have a Holy Expectancy of that kind of relationship with one another. And that Holy Expectancy is why we, as Paul says, 'pray without ceasing' the way Jesus taught us:

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.