

Matthew 6:13b footnote
July 27, 2008

South Plains
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

All Belongs to God

Whoever heard of preaching on a footnote in the Bible? I readily admit it seems pretentious, although everything printed between these covers belongs to God no matter who gets the credit. But, there is a critical difference between the words of scripture and the commentary, the paragraph headings added by the publisher, and the footnotes at the bottom of the page. The fact is that most modern translations of the Gospel of Matthew, using the most reliable manuscripts, do not consider the last line of the Lord's Prayer, the words we say in worship every Sunday, to be included in the original text. If you looked up the text printed in the bulletin under the sermon title, you found those words printed in a footnote at the bottom of the page. This doesn't mean Jesus never spoke those words; only that we have no reliable record of those words being part of Matthew's Gospel. Another way of asking the question with which I began is to wonder, "Why do we persist in finishing the Lord's Prayer in worship every Sunday with a footnote some scribe added?"

I believe the answer is that we cannot help ourselves. After praising our heavenly Father in the hope that his name will be hallowed, his kingdom will come, and his will accomplished on earth; after acknowledging God as the source of daily bread, daily forgiveness and

daily rescue from evil, we want to conclude this prayer with an exclamation of praise, this doxology, literally these "glory words." "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

Worship is appropriately full of doxologies. We use three every Sunday: After the Creed we sing, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen." When we bring the offering forward, we sing another doxology, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise him all creatures here below. Praise him above ye heavenly hosts. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." And, of course we finish the Lord's Prayer with "for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever."

Scripture is full of glory words, especially in the Old Testament scrolls that the early church heard Sabbath after Sabbath. I can imagine a fantasy scenario that shortly after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, somewhere a Jewish elder who was a follower of Christ, called for a session meeting to discuss worship. It didn't matter that John Calvin had not invented the session yet. They had elders, so they met like a session to discuss worship, a topic that always provokes opinions.

This particular elder made a little speech about the importance of every Christian praying the prayer that Jesus instructed his disciples to pray. Especially since the church in Jerusalem was under attack from in the

synagogues, and the Gentile churches in other cities were all but overwhelmed by the might and glory of the Roman Empire, it was essential that everyone remember how Jesus taught us to pray the prayer that concludes, "Rescue us from the evil one," or as the King James later would say, "Deliver us from evil." He made a motion that the whole prayer would be said as part of the prayers of every church.

It was a good motion despite the fact that nobody knew any church that was not already praying that prayer. Then, the fun started. Another elder offered an amendment to add an ascription of glory from King David because that elder said that Jesus admired David. King David prayed with these words: "Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom (I Chronicles 29: 11)." Can you hear how our Lord's Prayer echoes David's prayer?

Somebody else amended the amendment to allow other versions of the prayer because he heard that a fellow named Luke used different words. Another person who liked music wanted to sing the words of David. The session meeting was in danger of running amuck.

Finally, one wise, old elder who hadn't said anything spoke up: "Why are we arguing over the words of a prayer? The important thing is that people pray to the Lord, and the people in our churches are doing that. Most of our people can't read any motion we pass, and

anyway it's impossible to make them pray the way we want. The wonderful thing is that they are praying to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit."

Pretty soon the amendments were dropped. The motion carried that churches pray the Lord's Prayer. Having approved what was obvious, which is what sessions do best; this session was ready to adjourn. The moderator asked that wise, old elder to close in prayer. In my fantasy, he did so using the words familiar to us in Matthew, and he finished with his own doxology as a reminder to his session and church that no matter what human beings may say, "Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever."

There is evidence that by the end of the first century, the church was saying those words whether they were in Matthew's Gospel or not.

We continue to say those words for two reasons: First, despite what unbelievers think, it has always been true that God rules his creation which is his kingdom. And, second, one day it will be evident to everyone, believers and non-believers alike, that God rules.

Evidence to contradict God's rule is all around. Hurricane Dolly churned up the coast of Texas and Mexico last week and other storms are sure to follow. That sort of chaos in nature breaks out again and again to wreck havoc on God's creation and on our attempts at

civilization. Not that we humans are all that civilized anyway. During the Vietnam War, we destroyed villages to save them. But, we did not invent that terrible strategy. Kings and governments have been sacrificing what they claimed to want to save since the beginning of history.

God's kingdom is different because God sacrificed himself to save his kingdom. The primary power God uses to rule is the power of love. Jesus came announcing that the kingdom of love was close at hand. It was so close that he told them it was already among them. When he called people to live under the rule of this kingdom he characterized it as an easy yoke and a light burden. At our ice cream social two weeks ago, Jenna Ordell brought her miniature horse and offered rides in a little two wheeled cart. When I saw the size of that little horse was only 34 inches tall, I thought only little children would be able to ride around the churchyard because the horse was so small. But she invited me to sit beside her and the little horse pulled both of us around the church without any strain because the harness or yoke and the cart were designed to make the burden light and easy. God has designed human life to run much better when we live under his rule. It's our misguided way of running the world that gets us into trouble and makes life harder than it has to be.

Jesus offered a better way of living and worshiping, a way that some people found very attractive, but very foreign to everything they knew. They didn't

understand the law of love. So when people wanted to make him a king like the other kings of this world, he refused. When his closest disciples wanted special treatment in God's kingdom, he warned them that being first in the kingdom of God meant being last in line and servant of all. And, when the Roman authorities misunderstood his kingdom as a threat to the Empire, Jesus demonstrated servant hood by giving up his life out of love for the world.

His followers couldn't believe that he faced the conspiracy of the Jewish religious leaders and the violence of Rome with only the weapons of love. For three days, it seemed that hate and fear had proven more powerful. But, the power of love was vindicated by his resurrection from the dead. For those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, the kingdom of love is more powerful than the kingdoms of this world.

What's more, the rule of God in the kingdom of love will eventually be self-evident. God will rule. Love will triumph. When we pray "thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever," we are confessing our faith in that ultimate victory.

Even when we have no bread and are hungry, we believe God provides for us. No matter how guilty and unworthy we feel, we believe God forgives and expects us to forgive. Most important, we believe that God wants to help us and will finally deliver us from every evil, even from death itself. Because in Jesus Christ, the kingdom

of God has begun working its way throughout the earth.
The power of God is invincible. The glory of God is
forever. Amen.