

Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done...

December 12, 2021

Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church Rev. Dr. Jon Diefenthaler
Luke 7:18-35

Good morning! I am deeply grateful to my former student and friend, Pastor Labuhn, and to you here at Our Savior's Way's congregation for inviting me and my wife Ethel to come into your midst today on behalf of Lutheran World Relief (LWR), an organization to which you give a generous measure of mission support. It doesn't matter much what Lutheran church we attend. We all pray the Lord's Prayer, don't we? And in that same prayer, we all look up to God and say, ***"Thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."*** That's what we all pray. But the answer to that prayer, which we hope God will provide, is not the same one for each and every one of us. Not the same!

This is what we in fact find in the Gospel lesson for this day from Luke 7:18-35. The differing parties in this context are Jesus and the man whom God had chosen to prepare the way for His coming, John the Baptist. Every Advent season, we in the church hear about how this man went around trying to give people a good, swift kick in the rear of their anatomy, and warning them to get their house in order. Repentance was indeed at the heart of John the Baptist's ministry.

Yet once Jesus took the scene as the Messiah to whom John had pointed people, no lightning bolts came falling from the sky. The high and mighty King Herod, whose immoral life John had refused to overlook, did not change his ways. On the contrary, Herod had John arrested for being a "troublemaker" and thrown into prison. So there in his cell, this man had reason to think that perhaps he was mistaken about Jesus. In fact, he sent word to Jesus by way of his disciples, asking, ***"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to look for another?"***

John the Baptist thought he knew all there was to know about Jesus, but his imprisonment by Herod served to produce some second thoughts. All alone, he got to thinking that instead of being God's Son,

Jesus might be just another somebody from Nazareth. None of us, like John, is currently serving a jail sentence, but what can cause doubts about Jesus are the ugly realities of life in this world. Some we see with our own eyes, and then there are the ones the various media bring to our attention every day.

Jesus, in our text, told John the Baptist's disciples to go and tell him what you hear and see: ***“the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.”*** God's kingdom comes, and His will is done, on earth as it is in heaven, or so Jesus was telling John, through a life such as the one He models for all of His followers, including you and me. It started with Jesus' self-surrender of all the honor and glory to which He is entitled as God's own Son. It became manifest in His willing submission to the deepest needs of people around Him. We see this not only in the helping hand Jesus extended to the poor, the sick, and other disadvantaged members of society, but finally, and most clearly, at the cross on which He suffered and made the ultimate sacrifice of Himself for the salvation of every one of us.

This is the way God's kingdom comes, and His will is done, here on earth, as it is in heaven. It is Jesus the Savior's way, and it is our way as His followers. It is why I like your name as a church. I don't know how you got it, but this congregation is not just another Our Savior Lutheran Church. It's Our Savior's WAY Lutheran Church. It is also the reason I am here this morning to share with you a few ways in which your partnership with Lutheran World Relief (LWR) is enabling you to live up to your name as a congregation.

The same way that Jesus our Savior, described for John the Baptist in our Gospel text, is at the core of what Lutheran World Relief (LWR) is all about. It's what motivated our Lutheran forebears to create this organization at the close of World War II, some 75 years ago. Some of our leaders came to war-torn Europe in 1945 and saw first-hand how so many people, particularly in Germany, were devastated by all of the bombing and destruction that led to an Allied victory. Lots of “homeless” refugees, and even more people living on the brink of starvation!

When they became aware of this dire need, Lutherans in this country came together to help feed, clothe, and shelter these sisters and brothers in the human family. Through LWR, over a ten-year period, nearly 200 million pounds of relief supplies were gathered and sent overseas. Thousands of lives in fact were saved because of the efforts of people like you in congregations like this one.

Such “relief” work is what Lutheran World Relief (LWR) still does in emergency situations overseas caused by disasters of one kind or another. There were, for example, the dire needs of refugees, in camps in Lebanon from the civil war in Syria with little or nothing but the clothes on their backs. Also, there were the hurricanes that swept through Central America. In addition to the loss of life, many homes were either destroyed or suffered severe damage. In the case of Ernesto and his family in Honduras, LWR was able to come to his aid because we already had personnel on the ground in that part of the world, engaged in other projects.

These are also places where LWR quilts, all made by Lutherans across this country, are sent. As well as personal (or health) kits (a towel with bars of soap, toothbrushes and toothpaste, combs, and the like) assembled by our Sunday Schools, youth groups, as well as adults in our congregations. LWR is in fact able to send hundreds of thousands of these materials overseas every year. In addition, there are individuals in our congregations who answer appeals for cash contributions that enable LWR to purchase food and other needed commodities in “emergency” contexts. Why? Because this is our Savior’s way and the means by which God’s kingdom comes to people in today’s world.

For the past 50 years of our existence, Lutheran World Relief (LWR) has become just as interested in the longer-term development of people in our world who are living in abject poverty all of the time. Instead of giving such people just another “hand-out,” we want to give them a “hand-up,” so that they get to the point of being able to stand on their own two feet and become self-sufficient. It’s the reason we invest a good deal of our resources in agricultural projects. Most often, this involves coming alongside small, local farmers for the purpose of enabling them to work their own way out of the impoverished conditions in which they are living.

“Development” work is the name for this. One example of this is that of a vanilla and coffee farmer in Uganda named Suzan. She and her family have always been hungry because of repeated crop failures. But LWR has come alongside Suzan to provide the tools and the knowledge she needed to help her crops properly mature and thrive. The new and better farming techniques she has learned have enabled this family to now have enough food and to be self-sustaining. Here is a short video that depicts what I am talking about.

“I really see that God is answering our prayers,” says Suzan. It’s through Lutherans in this country and in your case a congregation that bears the name of Our Savior’s Way, that the answer has come. And it’s another instance in which God’s kingdom has arrived here on earth, as it is in heaven. The idea, however, is one that always disappoints some and makes the blood of other people boil. It’s the reason Jesus says in our text, ***“And blessed is he who takes no offense at me.”***

John the Baptist, in the eyes of others as well as Jesus, was no reed that tended to blow in the winds of public opinion. He did not try to climb the social ladder. Nor did he dress for success. John was a prophet - - - and then some because he was also the fulfillment of a word that God had spoken to His people long before His arrival on the scene. ***“No one has arisen greater than John the Baptist,”*** said Jesus; ***“yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”*** For what counts in God’s eyes is not our status. Nor is it our resume of achievements. On the contrary, it’s what Jesus Christ came to do for us. There is likewise nothing short of a resurrection to a new life that occurs within us whenever any of us in fact looks to Him and seeks to follow along with that same path that He did during His life and death here on earth.

At Lutheran World Relief, our mantra is *“until your love reaches every neighbor.”* For this is the goal that gives meaning and purpose to every day that God gives us! And in conclusion, therefore, I want to say, “thank you” on behalf of LWR for joining us in our efforts to become an answer to that petition of the Lord’s Prayer that we so often pray: *“Thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”* Amen.