

12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – **August 23, 2009**  
1 Chronicles 29: 10-13; Psalm 93; Matthew 21: 1-11

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***For yours is the kingdom  
and the power and the glory forever.  
Amen.***

Some of you know that I like to shop for clothes at consignment stores – more clothes for less money works for me! The thing about this kind of shopping is that it can be a bit time consuming. You go in and sort through the racks to find sizes and styles that are suitable and then head to the dressing room to try everything on. Then you need to examine each item carefully for stains or wear and tear – someone else’s idea of “gently used” might not be the same as mine and it is no good deciding an certain skirt or top is perfect and just what I want if it doesn’t stand up to inspection. Buying things I like at a good price is still a disappointment if they are going to fall apart at the seams under a little scrutiny.

Relationships can be the same way – some of them are best if you don’t look too closely. A friend’s faults can appear oppressively prominent if you observe too intently and that can lead to the having the friendship “fall apart at the seams” like a cheap suit. People and things that are very familiar and well loved can seem shabby or flawed if subjected to intense study.

People can react that way to biblical study too. The text at first read or face value seems full and vibrant and makes perfect sense so they get twitchy if you try to over-analyze it. Take a look at the reading from Matthew’s gospel today for example. Apparently Jesus tells the disciples to go to the village where they will find a donkey and a colt that they are to bring back to Jesus. Everything unfolds as Jesus describes and the disciples return with both a donkey and a colt. They put their cloaks on these two small animals and, according to the text, Jesus sits on them – both of them! Sounds a bit ridiculous to me – under a little scrutiny this part of the story appears to “fall apart at the seams.”

There are many explanations in commentaries and biblical reference books about this that I won’t go into today – something for another sermon I guess. The point is that at first glance the story is fine – it looks good – it fits – it matches with other things we know. However, under examination it challenges us.

That was part of my concern in doing this series on the Lord’s Prayer. Would this prayer which is so much a part of each service of worship and so integral to our identity as Christians “fall apart at the seams” if I looked too closely? Would I undermine its power and presence in my faith by teasing apart the details and checking how it was all woven together? Could I still pray the prayer with my whole heart if I scrutinized it – laid bare its strengths and weaknesses – wrestled with its shape and substance? Those are some of the questions and risks that accompany all biblical study.

Now that we approach the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer and this brief sermon series I am so glad that I undertook the project. Not because I feel that I have said all that can be said about this scripture text. Far from it! I doubt that I have even scratched the surface. Each time I approach the task of preaching I am aware that what I say is only one of the many things that can be said about a text. At some other time I may take an entirely different slant on it. Another person will see it through an alternate lens and tell you something different based on their experience or context. That is an inescapable fact of proclamation.

What I notice today about the Lord's Prayer is that the ending that is so familiar to us – *for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.* – isn't considered part of the biblical text by most translators. This built-in epilogue was likely not part of the original prayer and is not included in the oldest and best manuscripts. It is usually mentioned in a footnote that the early church added this appropriate concluding doxology based on David's prayer from 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles that Margaret read for us today:

*"Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our ancestor Israel, forever and ever. 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, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might; and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all. And now, our God, we give thanks to you and praise your glorious name.*

The great value of this conclusion to the Lord's Prayer is that it reminds us to whom we have been praying and it reminds us that for the prayer to be complete we must be prepared to give as well as take.

Our prayer is conversation with God – part of our continuing relationship with the divine – the royal power if you will. God is the one with authority in our lives. To say this part of the prayer affirms our submission to God and God's centrality in our every word and deed. We end the prayer by recognizing and asserting that God is king – we belong to God – we pledge obedience and faithfulness to the divine presence.

The word *power* comes from a Greek word similar to *dynamic* and *dynamite*. We end the prayer by remembering the dynamic force of God – the energy, the vibrancy and extravagance of God. As we pray about God's power we think of a God who listens and who acts in the world. We have trust and confidence that God hears our prayer and will respond dynamically – with power and passion.

When we say *glory* we are often referring to the kind of honour and reputation and fame that some kind of human achievement can bring but properly understood *glory* belongs to God alone. We end the prayer by reminding ourselves that we are in the presence of the divine glory – so we must live our lives with a reverence that never forgets we are living within the splendour of the glory of God.

Words like kingdom, power and glory are risky words that the world has grabbed onto for its own purposes. Kings and presidents build kingdoms and defend them with murderous intensity. Power is often used for self-interest and the control of others. Glory is what comes to those who wield more power than others. However the true meaning of these three words is captured in the life of Jesus. Ideas of power and glory that are divorced from his life and ministry are either false or incomplete. He brandishes neither the power of the sword nor of the popular vote – his is the power of obedience to the law of unfailing love – the power of forgiveness – the power of relinquishment – the power of embrace. Jesus shows forth the subversive power of powerlessness.

His glory is not that of raised flags and marching bands but of scars that affirm God's sacrificial love. His is the glory of the cross. He is not what people expected then – or now. Jesus is a contrary king – a contrary power – a contrary glory. And he bids us follow him.

Our catechism says that the word *Amen*, means that *this shall truly and certainly be – that my prayer is much more certainly heard by God that I am persuaded in my heart that I desire such things from God.* And so, as we conclude the Lord's Prayer and rise to go out into the world, we remember with Jesus the sovereignty of God and pledge again our obedience – we remember with Jesus the power of God and trust in that power to answer our prayers – we remember with Jesus the glory of God, living our lives with a reverence that knows the earth is penetrated and permeated with the divine.

What might the world be like if we truly followed the contrariness of Jesus?

What might you and I be like?

When he calls us to follow let all the people say:

***AMEN – it shall truly and certainly be!***