

09.23.2018

Conclusion of the Lord's Prayer –

“For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Rev. David V. Miller

Lutheran Church of the Ascension

Atlanta, GA

According to Merriam-Webster, this is the definition of doxology: “a usually liturgical expression of praise to God.” An “expression of praise to God,” that’s doxology. You probably already know The Common Doxology, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow . . .” And every week we sing a couple other well-known doxologies, the Gloria Patri, for example, (“Glory be to the Father . . .”) and the Gloria in Excelsis (“Glory to God in the highest . . .”). We call these doxologies because they ascribe glory to God. After all, the word *doxa* means “glory” in Greek. So, as we come to the Conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, we come to doxology, “For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the *glory* forever and ever. Amen.”

Speaking of doxology, a few examples come to mind.

Just the other week, I was putting the kids to bed after a great day together. I had some time off and we'd spent it playing and laughing and wrestling. They all had been behaving so well—no major meltdowns or tantrums of any kind. We'd even sat down at the dinner table as a family to a delicious steak dinner—everyone cleaned their plate. And now, having just put on jammies and brushed teeth, I had Eden and Jude snuggled on me as I read them bedtime stories. Part of our routine is to sing a hymn before bed, and tonight I knew just the one! After a day like that, doxology would be perfect, so I grabbed it from the shelf, blew the dust off, and let 'er rip. *Okay everyone, all together now, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow . . .”* With such a great day, and such a happy family, doxology felt right at home.

You might remember this summer my in-laws came to visit. I'm always amazed they drive all the way from El Paso just to see us every year. And when they do, we've got this tradition now. We grab a stack of towels, some sun screen, load up the van and head out to Lake Acworth. There's a beach there, with sand and everything, even a giant waterslide—Eden can't get enough of this thing. So, here we are, enjoying a picnic lunch together, throwing the Frisbee, building sandcastles, catching some rays, splashing around. That's the stuff of memories! My heart was full to bursting! Whether I said it out loud or not, doxology was alive and well. I felt it in my soul. *God, you are great! God, you are glorious!*

Then recently, I had a scare. It started out okay, just another phone call with my father. “Hi Dad, great to hear from you. Kids are fine. Church is good. Weather's beautiful here. How 'bout you?” And that's when he told me. His blood work came back kinda screwy and his doctor was recommending they take a biopsy. So, he was going to have it done and get the results a few weeks later. I don't remember the last time I prayed so hard. I begged, I pleaded, I cried. A month goes by, and I get him on the phone again. I'm nervous, I can't breathe, my heart is bracing for impact. “Hey Dad, how'd it go? Didja get your biopsy results back? . . . What's that? Negative? It came back clean!” My next words were doxology, “Praise God!” I said. There couldn't have been a better time for doxology. If ever there was a moment to give glory to God this was it!

But it didn't take long before a few things got in the way of doxology. A widow's grief. A sinner's confession. A visit to the hospital. A difficult counseling session. A rocky conversation. Do I dare take doxology with me? Should I leave it locked in the car? Is doxology out of place, does it even belong? It might be better to wait for a sunny day, a happier time. Maybe I should hold off on letting it out of the box. No sense in bringing it out just yet, let's wait and see what happens.

In Bible Study, we just got done with the book of Daniel. And surprisingly, after everything, Daniel still makes time for doxology. I mean, the guy's been ripped from his home, dragged 900 miles to a foreign city, is forced to submit to a pagan king, endures the news that the temple back home's been burned to the ground, even looks death square in the mouth. Yet, not a day goes by that Daniel doesn't make use of doxology. You can hear it in his words, see it in his actions, sense it in his visions. All things considered, you'd think Daniel would've left doxology back in Jerusalem, but he didn't. I wonder, why?

Or how about the Epistle reading this morning. The whole reason St. Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in the first place was because false teachers had come into the church and began to discredit his apostleship. They said to the Corinthians,

don't listen to that doofus, if Paul was really an apostle then wouldn't he be treated like it? After all, they challenged, would God allow an apostle to be imprisoned, be beaten several times within an inch of his life, receive the forty lashes minus one, get shipwrecked three times, suffer hardship by hunger and thirst, cold and exposure? But did you hear Paul this morning? In his letter to the church at Corinth, challenged by those false teachers, there's not one word that still isn't pregnant with doxology. Incredible how he could also tell the Thessalonians to give thanks in all circumstances. And the Philippians to have peace that surpasses all understanding. And the Romans, that God works all things together for their good. Imprisoned, beaten, shipwrecked, there wasn't anywhere Paul went that he didn't take doxology. Why?

Then there's Jesus. The early Church has pointed out how Jesus must've prayed through the Psalms while He was on the cross. When you look at some of His dying words, they all come from the psalter. "I thirst," that's Psalm 69. "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" that's how Psalm 22 starts. "Into Your hands I commit my spirit," you'll find that in Psalm 31. Being a good Jew, surely Jesus knew them by heart. And hanging around for three hours, he'd have enough time to pray all 150 of them. But do you think Jesus skipped the doxologies? Did He jump over the hallel psalms, the Hebrew word for praise? Even with nails through His wrists and thorns in His brow, nothing could stop Jesus from putting doxology to good use. Why do you think that is?

Psalm 22 is one of the most heartrending psalms. The psalmist seems to foreshadow the crucifixion, saying how he's a worm and not a man, how he can count all his bones, and is laid in the dust of death. But even a psalm like that culminates in doxology. Imagine Jesus praying this in the darkness, bleeding out, struggling for air. Here's how verse 23 goes,

"You who fear the Lord, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him,
and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!"

Just when doxology seems most out of place, is when doxology is most appropriate.

In a prison camp in World War II, on a cold, dark evening, hundreds of prisoners of war returned to their barracks. Just before, they'd undergone a series of beatings, were forced to march before the camp commander to be harangued for an hour, and now that it was lights out they were warned to keep quiet for the rest of the night. But somewhere in the deep silence and gloom of those barracks, someone dared to say the Lord's Prayer. Then, some of his fellow prisoners lying next to him began to pray with him. Suddenly, it began to catch on, until eventually their prayer was overheard in the next building and those prisoners joined in. One by one, each set of barracks joined in the prayer until, as the prayer was ending with, "For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory," hundreds of prisoners had joined their voices in a strong, ever-growing, defiant prayer, finally reaching a thunderous "Amen!"

The camp went silent again, but not before the tables had been turned. Not before these prisoners had thrown off their chains, and a new world had been sighted, signaled, and stated. Whenever our Lord's Prayer has been prayed, even on the darkest of days and the worst of situations, prisoners have been set free, the blind see, the lame walk, the poor have good news preached to them, and a new world—one that otherwise wouldn't be available to us—gets firmly established.

The theologian Karl Barth once said, "To clasp hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world." Doxology, particularly the Conclusion of our Lord's Prayer, is the great crescendo that recalibrates our lives and resets our attitudes. It reminds everyone that God's got some unfinished business with us. That even if it seems like a losing battle, we've already won the war. That you and I are in good with the One who's been known to bring light out of darkness, life out of death, heaven out of hell.

If doxology's ever inappropriate then that means God must be out of control, that somehow He's lost His grip on the leash, that there's no happily ever after at the end of our stories. And if that were the case, then doxology wouldn't really *ever* have a place at *any* time. But you and I know better. Daniel knows better. Paul knows better. And a man who walked away from His tomb three days later and ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God knows better. Not just in the good times but in all times, doxology! "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the

09.23.2018

Conclusion of the Lord's Prayer –

“For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Rev. David V. Miller

Lutheran Church of the Ascension

Atlanta, GA

glory forever and ever” declares once-and-for-all that heaven is open, God’s kingdom is come, and nothing can stop us—come hell or high water—from living already now in His new creation. Doxology—never leave home without it!