

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” <sup>35</sup> Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” <sup>36</sup> Jesus answered, “My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” <sup>37</sup> Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” <sup>38</sup> Pilate asked him, “What is truth?”

When I was a little girl, and we would visit my extended family in rural Kentucky, I would attend church with my grandparents and great-grandparents – the Courtneys and the Colemans. Theirs is a tiny little country church, Methodist. Sunday attendance has dwindled and is now between eight to twelve people, my grandmother included. It’s always been a tight nit group, three or four generations of baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals. Those who are left are related to one another by blood or by love. I remember a lot about that church. The living nativity costumes at Christmas time, the Vacation Bible School snacks during summer visits, and how my great-grandmother prepared the communion in the kitchen each month from the time she was twenty-five years old, but wasn’t allowed to assist the minister in serving it until she was 93 years old, sixteen years before she died at 109. I have a lot of good memories of their church, but I also remember several awkward moments.

Particularly, because they had a minister for several years who had a habit, during Sunday morning worship, of randomly calling on a man in the congregation to stand up and pray out loud. Without any warning, he’d say, “Bill, will you pray for the offering?” Or my grandfather Gene would be asked to give a prayer. Or Mr. Scott. There was no warning

whatsoever, and good luck saying no thank you! The preacher put them on the spot, and they stood up in their pew and prayed, out loud.

Even as a child, I thought that was a bad idea. In all my years of ministry, I haven't met anyone who just hopes that I'll make eye contact with them and ask them to stand up in a room full of people and pray without warning. Am I wrong? Is anyone itching to lead us in prayer right now? (Look at everyone inspecting their shoes!)

For some reason, praying out loud is super intimidating. It's the reason why I have some job security. But in four days, around tables across the country, Christians who never, ever pray out loud on the other 364 days of the year will be expected to voice a prayer before carving the turkey and passing the rolls. Maybe it will be you. Or you. Are you ready?

One of my jobs is to spiritually guide you to be more comfortable with prayer. I am a teaching elder, after all. So, today we're going to practice so that you're ready for Thursday.

The great thing about prayer is that there are so many styles to choose from.

Young children are taught very simple prayers that are easy to memorize and repeat. There's "Good food, good meat, good God, let's eat!" or "ABCDEFGH, thank you God for feeding me."

At our house, we taught our oldest to say, "Thank you God for our food and our family and our friends." The three Fs that cover so much of what we're grateful for.

You may have memorized a simple prayer. Would anyone feel comfortable sharing the simple grace for the meal that you learned when you were little?

That's great! Thank you! So, you could use a prayer like that. Or you could pray a spontaneous prayer, that's one that you make up on the spot. Those are a lot tougher for people to feel confident saying out loud, but if you don't know where to begin, I can offer you this advice.

Thirteenth century German priest and mystic Meister Eckhart said, "If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough."

That's good news, no? If your prayer is just a list of thank yous, you're doing something right. We can go for a long time with our thank yous. "Thank you, God. Thanks for the turkey and the gravy and the mashed potatoes, and green bean casserole. Thanks for grandchildren and grandparents. Thanks for enough food for today and leftovers for tomorrow. Thanks for refrigerators and Tupperware that keep leftovers cool and clean. Thanks for ovens and microwaves and indoor plumbing and electricity, so we don't have to cook over open flames anymore or boil every ounce of water we need.

Thanks for the supply chain that allows people without chickens, pigs, or cattle to have meat, people without gardens to have produce, and people without grape vines to have wine. Thanks for the beautiful fall we've had. Thanks for the energy in this church, and for the joy of watching the Dallas Cowboys crash and burn yet again.

Thanks for the talent and dedication that lives in Andy McCauley-Wallace. Thanks to the deacons, session, trustees, and committees that make this place run so lovingly. Thanks to all of you for being here. Thanks to everyone who worked the Christmas Bazaar yesterday.

But you can get carried away with the never-ending list of thanks for we all have, and the family will start to get restless, and their bellies will grumble, and you'll realize that the kids at the children's table are already sneaking bites of food as you go on and on and on. So perhaps spontaneous prayers are not the best for Thanksgiving dinner.

Maybe you need to go the opposite direction and find a super short prayer. Anne Lamott, one of my favorite writers, has a book called *Help. Thanks. Wow. The Three Essential Prayers*. And since she assumes that God knows what's happening, she gives permission to keep prayers that short. Help. Thanks. And Wow. Your hungry family might like that one. The food won't get cold with a simple prayer like that.

And of course, there's always the Lord's Prayer. An oldie but a goodie. Jesus taught us to pray this prayer, so it's never going to go out of style, and it's loaded with so much theological nuance. But I think, most of the time, we don't always realize what we're asking for with the Lord's Prayer.

There's a lot of good in the Lord's Prayer. It's communal. We pray to Our Father. And we honor God. And we ask for daily bread, daily assistance from God to get us through the day, but then, right in the midst of it, we ask for God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done, and it's like bringing out the glitter at a preschool. We're asking for utter chaos to unfold!

You think the Lord's Prayer is a safe choice to pray at a family dinner? Oh no, my friends. The Lord's Prayer is wildly revolutionary, and if your family has a no religion, no politics rule at the dinner table, like my grandfather did, don't you dare pray for God's kingdom to come. Why? Well, first of all, we're identifying Jesus Christ as Lord, and, in America, we often forget that Lord is a political title; and we're praying for the kingdom to come and God's will to be done, and that's counter cultural. It's radical. It's upside-down economics and values and priorities. It's. Not. Normal.

Do you want to bring up cultural, economic, and spiritual revolution at your family dinner? Well then, watch your language when you pray. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done . . . those are some dangerous words. It might be better to just stick with that ABCDEFG prayer.

But on this Christ the King Sunday, we are invited to remember what we believe about the kingdom of God and what we hope for when we hope that the kingdom will come and God's will will be done.

Lutheran minister Nadia Bolz Weber says, "I invite you to discover your own images of what the kingdom of heaven is like. To listen to Jesus when he says what it's like so that we can see it in our own lives and in our own world. And here's why: *When we can identify the kingdom of heaven sown around us . . . it's a subversion [of the culture we live in].* It's God peeking through the curtain and letting us know that there is a deeper reality present in the world – a reality in which God gets God's way. It's the light of God's Christ which shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot, will not, shall not overcome it. And seeing where God seems to be insistently, dangerously, gorgeously and hilariously sewing signs of the kingdom is important *because seeing signs of the kingdom of heaven loosens us from the*

*kingdom of this world. It frees us from the false promises of human culture and shows us that which is eternal and true and unstoppable.* It shows us that drug overdoses and greedy multi-national corporations and [relationship collapses,] and unemployment and senseless violence, [and poverty] are not the final word. God and God alone will have the final word. . . .

And the kingdom of heaven is not to be found alone or within the walls of a church sanctuary. It's found in the ordinary, the daily, the right in front of your face and you never realized it."

I found a great description of the kingdom of God as it was being lived out about nineteen hundred years ago. Aristedes was giving a report to the Roman Emperor Hadrian, and he writes, "It is the Christians, O Emperor, who have sought and found the truth, for they acknowledge God. They do not keep for themselves the goods entrusted to them. They do not covet what belongs to others. They show love to their neighbours. They do not do to another what they would not wish to have done to themselves. They speak gently to those who oppress them, and in this way they make them their friends. It has become their passion to do good to their enemies.

They live in the awareness of their smallness.

Every one of them who has anything gives ungrudgingly to the one who has nothing. If they see a travelling stranger, they bring him under their roof. They rejoice over him as over a real brother, for they do not call one another brothers after the flesh, but they know they are brothers in the Spirit and in God. If they hear that one of them is imprisoned or oppressed for the sake of Christ, they take care of all his needs. If possible they set him free. If anyone among them is poor or comes into want while they themselves have nothing to spare, they fast two or three days for him. In this way they can supply any poor man with the food he needs. This, O Emperor, is the rule of life of the Christians, and this is their manner of life."

It sounds like the kingdom of God to me. So if you use the Lord's Prayer on Thursday, remember, that's the kind of world you're praying for, and calling yourself to.

And if that's too political or controversial for your family dinner, there's one last prayer I can teach you. One that is less about the kingdom of God and more about joy and thanksgiving. But I need your help with this one. You have to get your rock and roll on. Pat, pat, clap. Pat, pat, clap. Pat, pat, clap. Pat, pat, clap.

God, You are a good God

Please accept this grace

As we sit together and feed our face

We've got food on our plates

We think that's great

Pretty soon we'll be puttin' on the weight

Singin' we will, we will

thank you!

We will, we will

thank you!

We will, we will

thank you!

We will, we will

thank you!

Thank you, God, and thanks be to God for all of you, and thanks be to God for all the food we will share with our neighbors, and for the abundance we will have on Thursday, and for signs of the coming Kingdom of God. Amen.