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A Series on the Lord's Prayer V. – “Thine is the Glory”

Matthew 6:13b

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.
King James version

You're in charge! You can do anything you want! You're ablaze in beauty!
Yes. Yes. Yes.
Eugene Petersen's "The Message"

Cuz you our king, You get da real power, An you stay awesome foreva. Dat's
it!
Wycliffe Society's translation into Hawaiian Pidgin

“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.” Did you know that the very earliest manuscripts of the New Testament that we have available to us do not have this line in them? In fact, for the first 200 years or so, the manuscripts that were copied and handed on and spread throughout the Mediterranean basin did not have this line in them, and the earliest Christian commentators and writers and pastors and bishops didn't know of this line either. We have a number of sermons and commentaries on the Lord's Prayer from the second century but none of them make any mention of this line. Moreover, while we usually read and pray the version from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as found in the book of Matthew, this prayer can also be found in the gospel of Luke, but Luke's rendering of this prayer ends with the line *“may we not be led into to temptation.”*¹

As best we can tell, this line appears to have been added sometime in the late second century or third century by one of those nameless scribes who was copying a previous version, and it turned out that that added line -- *“For thine is the kingdom and*

¹For a general discussion of the issues here, see www.bibletexts.com/versecom/mat06v09.htm

the power and the glory forever” – was so popular that it was the one copied from then on and thus now appears in many of the translations that are most familiar to us. The question that comes to my mind, as I suspect it does to yours is of course: why **did** one of those now-unknown copyists, 18 centuries ago, make this change?

For think about it: such a scribe would obviously have had to be a deeply dedicated Christian who had given his or her entire life to meticulously copying by hand every single jot and tittle of the entire Bible, from the Book of Genesis’ opening words, *“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,”* all the way to the last verse of Revelation: *“. . . come, Lord Jesus. . .”* Did any of you ever get in trouble in school (this was my life in 4th grade) and had to write something on the blackboard two hundred times like *“I will not talk back to the teacher”*? Do you remember how long it seemed to take while every one else was at recess? Now, imagine how long it took to copy the Bible’s words, for that was the only way of getting more copies in those days before scanners, before photocopiers, before the printing presses. Imagine arising each and every day to pick up quill and ink and to painstakingly copy this sacred, holy scripture. The tiniest mistake would waste expensive parchment and ink. For the work had to be perfect! So the notion that a mere scribe, no matter how well intended, would take it upon him- or herself to edit and “improve” upon the Lord’s own prayer seems odd at best and wrong at worst. In fact, how could any committed Christian, let alone one who has dedicated his or her life to the task of faithfully reproducing Holy Scripture **dare** such a thing?

Well, to get to the answer, I want to tell you three stories and ask what you think the most appropriate response should be to those stories. In the year 2000, seven-year-old Nicholas Green was traveling with his parents on vacation in Italy. Would-be robbers thought, for some reason, that the Greens rental car was a jewelry delivery vehicle that they had been planning to hijack. They opened fire on the Green family

and Nicholas was shot and died. Racked by grief, riven by anger, driven to the depths of despair by this senseless act, Nicholas' parents somehow found the courage to go on Italian television and announce that they were donating Nicholas' organs. The effect was astounding. Italy's organ donation rate – at the time among the world's very lowest – increased exponentially overnight, and the worldwide publicity surrounding what Nicholas' parents had done in the face of death inspired many others to register as organ donors. In 1944 an American army sergeant by the name of Harold Urick was blinded by a German land mine. Almost half a century later, Nicholas' gift allowed Mr. Urick to see his children and grandchildren for the very first time.² Now, what would you say about God in the face of such a story? For you and I would have understood entirely if Nicholas' family had become embittered and withdrawn from the world. No, what needs explanation, what calls for wonder here, is their ability to reach out beyond their pain and allow God to work through their tragedy to give an unspeakably beautiful gift to someone. To such a story, how can we **not** say: *For Thine is the glory!*"

Last month, in Natick, Massachusetts, a couple by the name of Cari and Lauri Riding returned home from vacation to find that their house had been pelted by eggs and the rainbow flag they'd put up after the Orlando shootings had been stolen. That weekend, a whole squadron of children rode their bikes around the neighborhood and delivered a rainbow flag to every home. Soon, virtually every house was flying that flag in silent but colorful testimony to the belief that no one, whether or not they were a gay couple a straight couple or whatever, should ever be treated like that. Both Christians and Jews all adorned their houses with those flags to testify to the best of American values and to a God for whom there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, gay nor straight. And, speaking for both herself and her wife, Lauri Riding said this: "Somebody's fear called them to action.... But our neighbors' support and love called

²http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2008-01-21-organ-donation-nicholas_N.htm

them to [a very different kind of] action, and love conquers hate. Love wins.”³ And in the face of such love triumphing over fear and hatred and bigotry, how can you not want to say *“Thine is the glory!”*

In January of this year, cowards from an Al-Qaeda branch in Kenya attacked a bus and demanded that the sixty-one passengers separate into two groups: those who were Muslims and those who were Christians. They intended, as they had done before, to then shoot and kill the Christians. A Muslim high school teacher by the name of Salah Farah stood up to them and said no. The assailants were enraged and shot Mr. Farah in the arm and the hip and left him to die. But they also left before they could complete their cowardly and vile mission, one that is specifically prohibited, by the way, by the Koran which repeatedly counsels that Christians should be treated with honor and respect. Mr. Farah was flown to a hospital in Nairobi where, unfortunately, he died a month later from his wounds. In that month, he could have turned bitter, he could have regretted his decision, he could have decided that he should have let the Christians die. But he didn't. Instead, before his death, he was able to give an interview in which he said “We are [all] brothers. It's only the religion that is the difference, so I ask my brother Muslims to take care of the Christians so that the Christians also take care of us. ... and let us help one another and let us live together peacefully....”⁴ In the face of such a life, in the face of such a witness to the highest ideals of both the Bible and the Koran of seeking to protect the innocent, in the face of a man who could have regretted a life laid down for his friends but did not, how can we not see God at work and be moved to say, *“To thine be the glory!”*

³<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2016/08/22/gay-couple-targeted-neighborhood-united/F1AYqZ1n1qiwCarKt8XcxL/story.html>

⁴<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2016/04/03/kenya-to-honor-muslim-hero-who-protected-christian-bus-passengers.html> and <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/muslim-man-dies-after-protecting-christian-bus-passengers-from-al-shabaab-terror-attack-in-kenya-a6823361.html>

Now, let's ask again: Can you begin to imagine what was happening in the mind of that nameless scribe, some eighteen hundred years ago as he or she sat copying the words that our Lord taught as His model of how to pray? "*Abba, Father, Daddy, which art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. . .*" Each letter of each word carefully calligraphied, precisely balanced beautifully on the page. And when the scribe got to the end of our Jesus' words: . . .*and may we not be tempted,*" the whole of that prayer had so moved our scribe that he or she could not help but utter: ***For thine is the glory, forever and ever...!*** Maybe he or she wrote it in the margin as an act of praise. Maybe it was written beside that line. We don't know. But it doesn't matter. For that scribe's expression of full-throated praise in that line came quickly to be recognized as so very appropriate for what Jesus was saying that it truly does express something wonderfully true, and worthy of being in the scripture.

So let us recall where we have been throughout this series: From Jesus' words in the Lord's Prayer we learn that God is holy, both near to us and transcendently marvelous, that God's will is never violent but always loving, God, like the very best of parents, will seek to provide bread without demanding the sacrifice or damaging of our children, unlike many other gods of the ancient or even modern world. Our God is always passionately persuasive, and our God never, ever would lead us to evil, but will indeed help us to resist evil, temptation, when it finds us. After such words, after such wonderful news, how can you ***not*** sing with joy "***For Thine is the Glory forever and ever...!***"

Of course, there are so many other things about God recorded in the scriptures that are *worthy* of praise, *worthy* of saying, indeed, "*thine is the glory.*" And so: When we remember and affirm that God is love unconditional, it is oh-so-right to add – *thine is the Glory*. And when we remember that God's love is, unlike our love, perfect and

unflagging, it is oh-so-right to add – *thine is the Glory*. When we say that God always seeks the very best that is possible in each and every moment for us and for all creation, it is oh-so-right to add – *thine is the Glory*.

But the most important praise, the praise from which everything else flows, is the praise that we affirm as the very essence of that good news, and that is this: – **that even in the midst of evil and death, the love of God, the care of God, the compassion of God, the *life of God does not, will not, cannot ever die***. Even in the face of remembering on this day, fifteen years ago, 3000 who died in a cowardly attack on innocent lives and remembering those hundreds of first responders who selflessly fled not away from but into the hell of that day to seek to save lives, **God seeks to comfort and redeem and do justice**. Even in the face of the worst that life can sometimes do to our hopes and our dreams and our lives and our possibilities, even in the face of mortality and finitude and loss, ***the life of God does not, will not, cannot ever die***. My friends, once we make that affirmation then our eyes can be opened to the way that God indeed is always at work to bring life from death, to bring good from evil, to bring hope from despair. Those stories, those experiences – like those I have shared with you this morning – are all around us, stories of life overcoming death, stories of God working even in the face of the worst that life can do. And that is why we can pray the Lord’s Prayer with trust and with confidence, grateful for what it teaches us, motivated by how it challenges us, comforted by its assurance of God’s utter goodness. Or, as we might say in short, “Thine is the glory, thine is the glory.”⁵

⁵I am very grateful to the Rev. Barbara Blaisdell for her wise counsel in helping to structure this sermon!