

“Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done”

*Douglas Cedarleaf, pastor, North Park Covenant Church,
Chicago, Illinois
Transcribed by Jeffrey Hunter, annotated by Hauna Ondrey*

T*his sermon was preached by Douglas Cedarleaf (1914–2000) at North Park Covenant Church (NPCC) in Chicago, Illinois, on June 16, 1963, two days prior to the 78th Covenant Annual Meeting. The year was weighted with significance for the civil rights movement. On April 12, nonviolent protesters—including Martin Luther King Jr.—were arrested en masse while marching to Birmingham City Hall. In the following days, high-school students continuing the protest were met with police dogs and fire hoses under the orders of Bull Connor, commissioner of public safety. This brutal aggression was televised, eliciting broad outrage and sympathy for the movement. Five days prior to Cedarleaf’s sermon, President John F. Kennedy had dispatched National Guard forces to support the integration of the University of Alabama against the opposition of Governor George Wallace. That evening, in a nationally broadcast address, Kennedy introduced the civil rights bill he would submit to Congress on June 19. In the early hours of the following day, civil rights activist Medgar Evers was assassinated in front of his home in Jackson, Mississippi. The March on Washington would take place on August 28, and the following summer the Civil Rights Act would be passed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson.*

On the Sunday of this sermon, North Park congregants were joined in the pews by Covenant pastors gathered in Chicago for a ministerial workshop preceding the Annual Meeting. In a real sense, then, this message was delivered not only to the congregants of North Park Church, but to the Covenant at large. Two days later Cedarleaf would present to the Ministerium “A Pastoral Letter to the Churches of the Evangelical Covenant Church of America,” as

chair of the resolutions committee. The letter called all Covenanters to repentance for their indifference to racial injustices and to join “the vanguard of those who help break down the sinful barriers which separate us.”¹

Prior to assuming the pastorate at NPCC in 1955, Cedarleaf had made the pages of the Chicago Sun Times and Time magazine for his leadership in resisting violent opposition to neighborhood integration as pastor of Erie Chapel Presbyterian Church in Chicago (1943–1948). While serving at NPCC Cedarleaf organized the neighborhood community toward housing equality and education integration.

The sermon is presented here with only slight modification. We recognize that despite both the pastoral and prophetic tone, some of the language—reflective of 1963—seems dated or even jarring fifty-three years later. In an interest to preserve historical accuracy, we chose not to edit the sermon to match the Quarterly’s current style.

From the good news according to St. Matthew, chapter 6, verse 10, we read, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” It would be interesting to know how many voices have been raised all over the world in this particular prayer and in this petition this morning. Across all the barriers of race and class and denomination. Across the seas. Across misunderstandings.

I see in my mind’s eye an archbishop resplendent in his robes in an Anglican cathedral chanting the prayer. I see a Baptist pastor in Russia in a crowded church in Moscow praying together with his people, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” I see a bearded Orthodox priest leading his people in a little out-of-the-way Greek village. “Thy kingdom come,” he prays. An Auca² Indian stumbling over these phrases just recently learned. A Chinese Christian saying it secretly for fear of the authorities who are trying to wipe out all thought of God’s kingdom. I hear a Roman Catholic priest intoning it in Latin.

It circles the globe, this heart cry of the human race. What will it be like when God’s kingdom comes? Do you hunger and thirst after it? Do

1. The entire letter is worth reading and can be accessed through the Frisk Collection of *Covenant Yearbooks* of the Covenant Archives and Historical Library, <http://bit.ly/CovenantYearbooks>; *Covenant Yearbook 1963*, pp. 206–208.

2. The Waorani. “Auca,” Qechua for “savage,” is the name given to the Waorani by their neighbors. Cf. Kathryn T. Long, “‘Cameras “Never Lie”’: The Role of Photography in Telling the Story of American Evangelical Missions,” *Church History* 72, no. 4 (2003): 820–51.

you seek after it? Is your blood stirred by it like it's stirred by a new home or a new car or a new washing machine? Does your blood beat with it? Does it hammer in your temples sometimes late at night? Do you hunger and thirst for it like a man lost in the desert? Does God's kingdom—his rule—mean anything to you this morning? Do you believe that your final destiny will be with *this* kingdom? When all the rest of the kingdoms are shaken there will be only one kingdom, and this is the rule and reign of Almighty God who set the Pleiades in their spaces, hung the earth on nothing. Do you have any hope this morning? Do you believe there is any kingdom that will not be shaken?

Why doesn't God answer this prayer? That's what I want to know. People have been praying it for all these years since it first fell from the lips of our Savior. People in desperate straits, "O God, thy kingdom come." People dying under the oppressor's heel, walking in seas of blood. People who knew not which way to turn.

I remember a little old man in the slums [...] to visit him, someone said he was dying [...]. The faucet—you couldn't even turn it off [...] dripping, the dripping, as he lay [...]. Thy will be done [...] what it's all about. Your will being done in a place like this—how is it possible? Like the ancient Jews, I said, "How long? How long, God, how long?" Why isn't it answered with all these people, some eight hundred million of them in a grand chorus Sunday after Sunday saying, "O God, thy will be done. Thy kingdom come"?

Is it just for us? Are the people right who say it's dangerous to pray the Lord's Prayer because after a while people don't pray it at all; they just intone it? They just say a prayer. They get together on a beautiful Sunday morning and everybody is caught up in the glory of it and nobody pays any attention to what he is really saying. If Jesus Christ came in and said, "You really want my kingdom to come? Is this what you're after? You really want my will to be done in the whole world? In your life? In your job? In your home? Is this what you're really after?" We would cringe and say, "God, go away! This isn't what we want. Leave us alone. Leave us alone. We're comfortable the way we are. We've got everything we need. We live in the greatest nation in all the world. The kingdom of America is good enough for us!" Are they right who say it's best not to pray a set prayer because after a while the words and phrases go through a man's mind like worn coins until they no longer even awaken him to

3. Bracketed ellipses indicate skips in audio.

the marching truth that he expresses, all unknowingly?

Well, could I take a few moments this morning to talk with you about what this petition means? What does it mean, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”? Well, our Lord never defined this kingdom. He expected that the Jewish folks who had longed for this kingdom long before his birth knew what he meant by it. Very, very often in order to make it clear he used parables for the purpose of lighting up its central meaning.

The kingdom of God, what is it like? It’s like a sower who goes out and sows his seed in the field and some of it comes up and some of it is choked out and some of it is picked up by the birds [cf. Matthew 13:3–4, 7]. What is this kingdom like? This kingdom is like a woman who hid some leaven in three measures of meal, and the whole thing after a while was leavened [cf. Matthew 13:33]. What is it like? It’s like a thief coming at midnight [cf. Matthew 24:42–44]. You’ve read them, and so have I. What do all these add up to?

Well, in the first place the absolute declaration that though there are earthly kings, behind the earthly king is the one invisible King. It is God, the God who made the universe. Go out and tell your neighbor, the universe is not like a runaway train going down a mountainside. The universe is made by a loving and compassionate God. A God who stands against evil with all the powers that he can command. A God who loves the good. A God who takes pity on his poor, erring children. A God who calls them back, who calls [...] his only begotten Son on a cross. Do you believe that God runs it all this morning? [...] in his hands? That he’s got the little bitty baby in his hands? He’s got you and me in his hands? That when all’s said and done his will will be done, regardless of all the little dictators that strut across the stage as though they were able in their own hands to contain the destinies of men? Do you believe this morning and can you shout with gladness that God is the ruler, the ultimate king?

There is a second strand of truth in this kingdom. It is that there is a great day coming when God’s rule, which is now at least partially hidden, will fully be revealed. As one of the poets puts it,

Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,—
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim
unknown,

Standeth God within the shadows, keeping watch above his own.⁴

Paul declares it, “That at last every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” [Philippians 2:10–11]. Do you believe that as we look at the strange, complex systems that men have devised, that someday there will emerge beyond the shadow of a doubt the evident rule of Almighty God?

There is another thing: that this perfect day coming is a day when God’s whole family will at last be together. That the genius of the Christian faith is not just that men are saved individually here and there and go their own separate ways, it’s that we are the sons and the daughters of God. That all of us are destined at last to be together.

Every Jew longed for this rule of God. Do you long for it? I think Branscomb’s definition is a pretty good one. He says, “The kingdom may be defined thus. It is a group of individuals bound together by a common allegiance to God who do his will and receive his blessings and await his righteous judgment in the world.”⁵ The Christian believes that history, when it’s finally over and God the author walks out on the stage, we will understand then why it was he did this or did not do that. The Christian trusts God.

But you know, the amazing thing is this: that the people who waited for the kingdom, when the one came who was the only one able to so incarnate the meaning of this kingdom, they decided that he could not live. And so as the circle of hate closed round him more and more, they finally brought him to a cross on Calvary. Now the question I want to ask this morning is, have you ever felt that there might be some danger in your life that though when one speaks about the consummation of this glorious kingdom, it does [not] stir our blood? When we think about the way in which God has come to save us from our sins, we cannot help but feel that God must love us a very great deal. But when we ask why it is that the kingdom does not come, why it is delayed, and why God does not answer the prayers of his stricken people, have you wondered

4. James Russell Lowell (1819–1891), “The Present Crisis.”

5. B. Harvie Branscomb, revised by Ernest W. Saunders, *The Message of Jesus: A Survey of the Teaching of Jesus Contained in the Synoptic Gospels* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), 41. The quotation reads, “So we might define it thus: a group of individuals bound together by a common allegiance, who do God’s will perfectly and on whom God pours forth his richest blessings.”

sometimes, even if you are Christian, if maybe you and I could be in the way? You see, what I am trying to help us decide together is if we really want God's kingdom to come. What I want us to decide together, if we can, is whether or not we are just giving lip service to this whole thing.

The prophets had some very serious things to say to the Israelitish people because it appeared to them that their religion only inhered in their mouths. "Your lips," said Isaiah [29:13], "they praise me, but your heart is really far from me." Jesus, knowing the danger especially for people like us, ministers, he said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord'" —notice the repetition— "shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day, the great day that is coming, many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! Did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me you workers of iniquity'" [Matthew 7:21–23]. And this is evidently, I say, being said to people like me. People who earned their living by saying, "Lord! Lord!" People who earned their living, maybe, by doing many mighty works and casting out a few demons once in a while.

Doesn't it come to you sometimes with a terrible anticipation that we might really just be fooling ourselves? That when we come and sing all these wonderful songs about "Love divine all loves excelling"; when we say, "Take my life and let it be dedicated Lord to thee"; when we say, "Take my moments and my days and take my silver and my gold" —what if he said, "All right, this is what it's going to cost you to follow me." Wouldn't we turn tail and run as rapidly as we could for the doors?

The Apostle Paul reveals his heart to us when he says, "It concerns me sometimes that though I've preached to other people, I myself might be disqualified" [cf. 1 Corinthians 9:27]. Now our Lord recognized again and again and again that the supreme temptation of the Christian life was to talk about it, to make pretty mottos, to put it up on the wall and say, "Isn't that beautiful? Doesn't it just move your heart? Isn't that the most wonderful saying you've ever heard?" "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' Isn't that a beautiful sentiment? I just think it's one of the most wonderful things that ever fell from human lips." "I like the Golden Rule, 'Do unto others as you would be done by,' and this would be a good thing to put up over my desk."

You see, I am trying to ask myself if I really care about the will of God at all. Do I ask anything about God's will when it comes to the matter of

what I should pledge to the kingdom each year? Or do I say, “Go away now, please, God, for a little while; I have a little bit of business to do here, and it would be much more convenient both for you and me”? When I am in a discussion with my wife that’s approaching what might be called an argument, do I say, “Come now, dear, we shall look to God and see what he has to tell us”? Do I really want to be objective? Is there any way of being objective except to call in he who knows everything about the situation? Do you consult God when you’re taking a new job? Do you consult God when you’re moving out into a new neighborhood? I talked with some friends the other day who moved out into a new neighborhood, and I said, “What church are you going to?” “Well,” they said, “we haven’t looked around for any yet. I don’t think there is any right close by. But we’re Christians. We’ll find a church.” They had moved out into the neighborhood and not even asked whether or not there were possibilities here for service of the God whose kingdom they sought above all else. Do you consult God about the use of your time and your energy? When you’re asked to serve on a committee in the church do you consult God before you send back a letter saying, “I’m just too busy”?

And let me ask you, too, because I’m inclined to feel that we had best raise this question at its sharpest. And let me warn you before I tell you what I’m going to talk about that I am facing this with you. That we’re all in it. That there is no possibility of any single person’s evading this question. Let me tell you that I am speaking to you as a friend, as a Christian brother. Let me tell you, I am not trying to dictate your conscience.

Let me ask you where God is in this whole business where one-tenth of the population of America is crying for justice.⁶ Is God hearing this cry? Will God answer this cry? When they cry, “Thy kingdom come, and thy will be done,” will God hear what they have to say? And if he hears it, what will happen to the nine-tenths of us who feel either, on the one hand, that these folks should be restrained, or else we will *nothing* in the matter? We just let it go. We are just indifferent. We hope this big, bad ogre will go away. And it sounds to me as though the voice of God himself is thundering through the pain of these people, “You had best wake up, wake up, lest at last you shall be submerged in the wrath of the heavenly Father who will not allow one-tenth of the human beings

6. The 1960 U.S. census registered 10.5 percent of the total United States population as black. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population: 1960, Vol. 1, Characteristics of the Population* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964), 145.

in this nation to be denied their basic rights!”

Friend, is God on the side of Martin Luther King? Is God on the side of Bull Conner? Is God on the side of Governor Wallace? Is God on the side of the Supreme Court? Friend, you who are a Christian—and if you are not a Christian this morning, you who are an American—you must decide this sooner or later. Is the cry of the Negro for justice in this community a cry that is actuated by God Almighty, and will God Almighty answer his prayer? Is it possible for us simply to sit here and hope somehow that maybe we will still be able, double-tongued as we are, to talk about the will of God while we have nothing to say about sharp-fanged dogs? While we have nothing to say about fire hoses turned on children? While we have nothing to say about a shot in the back? Which side are you on?

I want to point out to you that it was in specific instances like these throughout the Old and the New Testament where a person had a possibility of deciding which side he would be on. Joshua stands before his people, and he says the time is over for temporizing; you must come to a conclusion. “You choose this day who you’re going to serve. . . . As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” [Joshua 24:15]. Elijah says, “If Baal is God, go ahead and follow him, by all means follow him. If Yahweh is God, then follow him” [1 Kings 18:21]. The people who listened to what Jesus had to say had to respond. There was no way out of it. To be indifferent was to turn one’s back upon him.

Now, let me make things as clear as I possibly can. I am asking at this moment for you to decide in your own soul whether or not you can mix up God’s will with our keeping a tenth of our population submerged. Do you want to pray with me that God will sharpen the teeth of Bull Connor’s dogs? Do you want to pray with me that more black men will be shot in the back? Do you want to join me in prayer that the fire hoses be made ever greater in their pressure so we can mow down these people and put them back in their place where they belong?

Now if you choose this road, you have a right to do this and defy the law of America. You have a right to do this and defy the law of God, if this is your wish. But no one has ever defied the law of God and found peace. If, on the other hand, you want to say, “God, bless these leaders who have tried in every possible way they could by what appears to be, if not Christian, at least ethical means to gain the rights we all enjoy. God bless these people.” I want you to notice now I am not saying that the problem is a simple one. I don’t know how the former will be imple-

mented in the future—the side of Bull Conner. I don't know how the latter—the side of God—will be implemented in the future. There will be many difficulties, I am certain.

I was proud of our congregation the other night. We got a letter from Dan Ericson⁷ who said, “We've got a couple of people here who are Haitians. The man has an MA from Columbia University. They want to come to the United States with their four children, settle down in a neighborhood somewhere, and see that their children are educated. We want you, if you will, to sponsor this family.” And the congregation said, yes, of course we will sponsor them, after we'd thought about what this meant in our community with dark people only coming in as domestics and workers in gas stations.⁸

But friends, there is more to it than this. You who are the members of this congregation, are you willing and ready to welcome these people when they arrive? They will be here as big as life, six people with darker colored skin than yours. You're going to have to answer these neighbors around here who say, “That stupid church is bringing dark people into this community.” What will you have to say? Will you dare to say, “Brother, it's the will of God. I don't know where it's going to end. I know this, that we have to, in every situation, take the responsibility and the problems that come along with it of being Christians, of following Jesus Christ. This is all I know. I am willing to trust God for the rest”? Or will you say, “Yeah they're a bunch of foolish n*****-lovin' Christians; I think I'll get out of that old church. They have really gone off the deep end.” Friend, this is what you're going to be asked. And you men, who come from different parts of the country, and you women, who sing these great songs about our nation and its freedom, are you ready to come to terms with this? Will you identify yourself in some way or other?

I've been trying to think about what could be done. And you know, the suggestion I am going to make now is so corny I almost hesitate even to say anything about it. But I've lain awake nights lately. I said to myself, O God, is there any way that—I'm white, I've got all these privileges—is there any way that I can show a person of a different colored skin that in

7. L. Daniel Ericson (1922–2012) was a Covenant minister and missionary who served in Congo from 1951 to 1974. At the time of this sermon Ericson and his family had recently returned to the United States on home assignment.

8. In 1960, African Americans comprised 3 percent of North Park neighborhood's 17,866 residents. Evelyn M. Kitagawa and Karl E. Taeuber, eds., *Local Community Fact Book: Chicago Metropolitan Area, 1960* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1963), 41.

this awful struggle I want to do what God wants me to do? And if you can imagine anything so crazy, I've come up with a badge—a badge of all things. As silly as a wedding ring or as a flag hung out. And I'm afraid that some of the people who wear this badge are going to feel that they're holier than other people because they wear the badge. And some people who don't say, "They really must be off their rocker going around with a badge hanging on them, trying to tell people that they're Christians and good people and all that kind of thing." But you know, the average person when he's faced with a problem as great as the problem we face today says, "Give me a handhold. What can I do?"

Write a letter to Martin Luther King. Pray. Become informed. All this is important. Are you praying about this problem? Do you want God's will to be done in it? Do you really want God's will? Are you informing yourself? Have you read a single book, one single book at this late hour in this situation? Have you read one single book that would help you decide as a Christian what is the right side to be on? The Bible first of all? And maybe some other book? *Segregation and the Bible* is a good book; get it for a dollar.⁹ Have you discussed it with your friends?

But you know, I think the time has come. And because our own people here in the North Park Church have felt that the coming of the Boncys to the North Park community, this Haitian couple and their children,¹⁰ may open a way for bearing witness to the fact that God is no respecter of persons, that these Christians are our brothers and sisters, too, I've wondered if it wouldn't be helpful to wear something that would excite peoples'—wonderment, maybe? I'm not going to suggest a yoke like Jeremiah wore walking around Jerusalem, a big, heavy wooden thing. I'm not suggesting that somebody best go naked like Isaiah did and try to impress these people with the fact that God's horrible judgment was coming down upon them. I just want to suggest that anybody who's willing make or buy something or other, a little thing like this. It's half black, and it's half white. The black and the white are together. They

9. Everett Tilson, *Segregation and the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958).

10. Roger Bony was a prominent attorney in Haiti who fled the country after refusing a juridical position in the regime of president François Duvalier ("Papa Doc"). Bony took a U.N. position in newly independent Congo (1960), helping to establish a Congolese court system following Belgian withdrawal. It was in Congo he met Dan Ericson. Roger and Emma Bony and their children arrived in Chicago September 1963 and became active members of North Park Covenant Church. In 1967 Roger Bony was hired by North Park College to teach French and Latin.

can't be taken apart if they're God's children. The black and the white are both the same size. There's a little gold pin at the top here. This would be supported on the garment by this little gold pin. And at least for the religious person, Christian or Jew, this little gold pin would mean the Golden Rule. And he's saying to anyone who looks at it, you know we feel that it's time to let a lot of black people know, who imagine that most of the whites are against them, that we want to do God's will. We believe that the Golden Rule is the fulcrum on which hangs the law and the prophets, "Do unto others as you would be done by."

How foolish can you get? If I had something more sophisticated to suggest, God help me, I'd suggest it. But in my honest attempt to say, "What will help people rise out of their indifference at this point? What will help us decide whose will we're going to follow?" I'm going to offer these to people. I don't have any now. I'm going to have to ask for some women to sew them up for me. My wife did this one. I think you could do about thirty-five or forty an hour if you're good with a sewing machine. You can sew it up yourself if you want—even a man could; I could in a pinch. It's really very simple. Would you wear something like this? People at the conference¹¹ will be asking you, "What's wrong with you?" Maybe you can tell them that you feel the hour has arrived where, with all its difficulties, I would like to follow God's will. Maybe you feel that you can't wear one, God bless you. Will you study and pray? And will you think? And will you help me? And if you've got any better idea than this, oh, I'd be so grateful for it.

Are we going to just sit still here? Until this tidal wave, maybe, of hate and lust and violence overflows us? Are we as a Christian church—while a good portion of our population suffers under the horrors we have seen these people suffer under, human spit, the fangs of a dog, the force of water—shall we just sit here until God in his mighty wrath shakes the whole world until nothing is left at all except those who believe in his kingdom and welcome it with joy and go into heaven with people of all colors and stations and all backgrounds, all those who put their trust in Jesus Christ? Do you want God's kingdom? Sometimes I hesitate and say, "God, God, what you're calling for now is above and beyond me." But this is why Christ came, I think. He came to offer the power of his

11. The 78th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Covenant Church, held June 18–23, 1963, at North Park College and Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois.

heavenly Father through that Holy Spirit in which we find one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

If you'd like to help us make these things—you see I have faith that a few people would wear them besides myself.¹² One of my Negro friends said, "Here we sit in this restaurant. I think your idea's awfully corny, but I can't tell you what it would do to the inside of me if I came here, came into this restaurant where there are no other Negroes, and I saw a few fellows sitting at a table. I'd know then where I could go and sit down."

Friend, whatever way you do it—wearing a badge or saying a word or reaching out a friendly hand or just praying, "O God, show us some better way than any we've seen yet to follow Jesus Christ"—may we be praying together, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, here in this neighborhood, here in this community, in my family, O God, in my church, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

12. The minutes of the 1963 Ministerial Meeting suggest the outcome of Cedarleaf's proposal: "At this point, the chairman of the resolutions committee presented the revised copy of the 'Pastoral Letter' to Covenant churches. In an additional statement Mr. Cedarleaf showed a black and white ribbon affixed by a golden clasp, symbolizing the wearer's recognition of the essential oneness of all mankind before God, an equality interpreted by the Golden Rule—this being a sort of a 'handle' by which the average person might tackle the race problem so gravely facing the United States today. He proposed that these be made up and worn in our home communities all over the land. Many responded by purchasing and wearing the ribbons, in the expectation that this should result in many a fruitful conversation" (*Covenant Yearbook 1963*, p. 210). The NPCC June newsletter reports that, following Cedarleaf's June 16 sermon, several women "kept their sewing machines busy producing the 200 badges, most of which were sold to Covenant ministers and other delegates at the annual conference of the denomination. It is hoped that this simple idea will have a wide circulation." *North Park Covenant Church Newsletter*, June 1963, p.1; Covenant Archives and Historical Library, Record Series 8/2/10/23, Box 19, Folder 2.