

This week's second lesson continues the revelation to John that we find in the book that bears this name.. There is a section that is one of my favorite in all of Scripture. The larger portion reads:

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come."  
And let everyone who hears say, "Come."  
And let everyone who is thirsty come.  
Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.  
The one who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon."  
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The request, "Come, Lord Jesus!" is translated in the Aramaic as Maranatha. And it is a fitting appeal, perched as it is at the very end of the whole of Scripture. In essence, it is the phrase that has been echoed down through the centuries by believers in every time and space. For all of us have been in those situations where we long for the fullness of God in Christ to be known and to end whatever struggle we find ourselves in. Amen is right!

As with so many other texts and traditions within the Christian movement, there is more than meets the eye. In this case, Maranatha is not just interpreted this way. Maran-atha means "Come, Lord Jesus!" Yet, Mara-natha can be translated, "The Lord comes." (Or it might be the other way around. Aramaic is not my strong suit, but you get the gist.) What is so compelling about the richness and multifaceted nature of Maranatha is that it seems to capture well the fullness of life and faith.

"Come, Lord Jesus!" is, as was mentioned, a perennial request among us all. And often we are at our wits end when these words slip from our lips. Another way that I have heard it articulated is, "Please, please, please, please, please, please, pleeeeeeassssseeee!" And if this is the request that we make while rooting for our favorite team, or hoping to win the lottery, or as a mantra to get whatever it is that we want, well, I think we recognize the short-sightedness of such a statement. However, in the crucible of a health crisis or a relationship struggle or the recognition of pain within ourselves or those we love, such an appeal bubbles up from the center of our being. It is one of the most authentic prayers.

Meanwhile, "The Lord comes," is the articulation of a profound hope amidst these very same vicissitudes of life. One statement entreats. The other declares. And we often find ourselves throughout life moving between these poles. At times, we are aware of and able to acknowledge the presence of God in Christ. In many and various ways, the Blessed Mystery of life is made known to us, and our perception of ourselves, others, and the world around us is never quite the same. The lens through which we perceive our reality is tinged with the knowledge that we are not alone, will never be alone, and, in some way, may rest in the promise of this connection.

Thus, Maranatha is an appropriate word to tie up the whole of Scripture. Indeed, from Genesis onward to the very Revelation to John, the tension that Maranatha, literally, expresses has been on full display. Adam and Eve aware of God's presence in Eden, only to long for the fullness of God to be revealed again after leaving Eden. Noah painfully aware of the absence of God amidst the flood, only to see the divine present yet again in a rainbow. Abraham gifted to rest by the

oaks of Mamre with the Lord of all, only to wonder where that God might be as he and Isaac move up the mountain where Isaac is to be sacrificed. Jesus' insight of God's pleasure for him in his baptism by John in the Jordan, and his longing for a sense of that presence to be known amidst his cry of dereliction from the cross, "My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?" Peter recognizing the mystery and presence of the Christ-reality in Jesus as he declares him the Messiah, and the fear of abandonment and longing for Jesus' presence that leads to his betrayal of his friend on the night of Jesus' arrest and trial. And on and on it goes.

Engaged in life and the life of faith, we will invariably vacillate between these poles. As a math teacher recently instructed his students, "Remember the movement of the sine equation? The sine equation is like an S turned on its side. There will be times when you are rising and feeling good, and then later, you will be on the downward slope and things will be difficult. Remember that in the difficult times, the sine equation will take over and things will rise again." Well, for us, Maranatha captures it all. The beauty of life together is that when we cannot recognize the reality of the Holy—the Lord comes—there are others who can do it for us, and when we are stuck in our request, "Come, Lord Jesus." we are not alone. There are others praying with us. Those who have prayed with us down through the centuries. Those who pray with us now. And those who will follow and pray for us still.

Maranatha!