

Thy Will Be Done...
August 10th, 2014

Matthew 6:10b
Pentecost 9 A **Pastor Rob Zeratsky**

As we take the Lord's Prayer to heart and pray it carefully with every intended meaning, the petition we come to today can be the hardest to choke out past our sinful nature. If you don't hesitate at this one, then either you have an incredibly amazing faith, or an incredibly shallow one that hasn't considered the implications of what we're asking here. Jesus himself prayed these words in earnestness and he ended up nailed to a cross and hung in the air to die. What is it we're asking or even inviting on ourselves when we pray: **"Thy will be done."** The words may stick in our throats because a darker voice suggests to us that this is a dangerous prayer to pray. We are tempted to think we are asking for trouble, opening ourselves up to untold misery by asking that God's will be done in our lives. Is God's will really a "good and gracious will?" Do the words of old hymns – *"The Will Of God Is Always Best"* and *"What God Ordains Is Always Good"* – do those comfort us or do they remind us times like when we were little and the nurse pulled out a six inch needle saying, "Now, this won't hurt a bit." Our old nature argues: We've been hurt plenty, and we'd like to know how the will of God fits into all of this.

And what about God's invitation to pray in the first place? **"Call upon me in the day of trouble,"** says God, **"I will deliver you and you will honor me."** (Ps 50:15). And yet the disabled man at the pool of Bethesda lies there for 38 years before Jesus crosses his path. You stake everything on what seems to you to be the obvious will of God for your life, on something God certainly has the power to accomplish – a recovery from illness, the birth of a healthy child, a promotion you worked so hard for, a wayward family member you prayed and cried for.

But then it all goes south on you. The illness lingers on despite your prayers. The baby is born with disabilities. You see your name on the list of lay-offs down at work. Your relative only makes it worse. And we throw our hands up and ask why.

Remember how it was with Mary and Martha? Their brother Lazarus is sick and dying. They send word to Jesus: **"Lord, the one you love is sick."** (Jn 11:3). The Bible says that when Jesus gets word, he delays – on purpose! Lazarus gets worse. He dies. His cold body is laid in the tomb. Four days go by for the sisters and no one has come. Did the sisters stop looking down the road for Jesus? Did they give up hope he would come? So it goes. You sit there, wondering when Jesus is going to come down that road to help you. You send word to him in your prayers: **"Lord, the one you love is sick."** or "the one you love can't pay the bills," or "the one you love can't see what good it does to stay faithful my responsibilities when no one notices how hard it is."

Stare down that road as you may, you see no sign of Jesus coming. Jesus delays, makes you wait. In the hospital waiting room, at the funeral home, in an hour of family crisis, in long, drawn-out days of utter loneliness – does Jesus know what he's doing? Does he understand how bad it is?

Of course he does. Perhaps it is I who have failed to understand. Do I understand at such desperate times that waiting patiently for Jesus to come to me is another name for faith – as in, **"My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen wait for the morning?"** (Ps 130:6). Am I willing in such dark times – or even when I'm glad and at peace – to let God be glorified in the eyes of others, to let them see me maintain a cheerful trust in my Savior when it seems like life couldn't possibly get worse? Can I show a trust that Jesus has had everything mapped out perfectly from the very start? That like Mary and Martha and Lazarus he has a very important reason for what is happening and I trust that.

The apostle Paul begged God three times to remove what he called **"a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me."** (2 Co 12:7). Three times God declined, saying, **"My grace is sufficient for you."** (v9). Jesus *invites* us to pray, *commands* us to pray, teaches us *how* to pray, and yet God's children still become unemployed, or are laid low by illness. Dreams are dashed. And death stalks ourselves and all our loved ones.

"Thy will be done." Is this a sad prayer of grim resignation, a doom and gloom prayer that says: "Well, God, you're bigger than I am. You're going to make me pass through this dark valley anyway. I suppose, if it has to be this way then Thy will be done?" Or is God's will something better and brighter than that?

Of course it's better! As the blood-bought children of God we know that, don't we? In a very large way, the questions that trouble us about the will of God are answered in the first two words of this prayer Jesus taught us: **"Our Father..."** When you start questioning if God's will should be done, if it really is good for you, then look back to the start of the prayer. If God is our Father through faith in the one who died and rose again for us, then he will not give us stones for bread. Then nothing can touch us without his allowing.

St. Luke recorded for us an occasion where a leprous man came to Jesus. Falling down at his feet, he prayed a very short prayer: **"Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."** (Lk 5:10). The man had no doubt that Jesus *could* heal him. But he understands that God is not to be held to our wills. God may have other plans than us, and it goes without

saying that if God has other plans than ours, they are *better* plans. Consider the man's faith: "Lord, I know you can, but only if you want to. Lord, you alone know. Maybe I need to be free of this disease. Perhaps I need to be restored to my family again, not just for my sake, but for theirs too. The wife has no pension plan. No social security. She needs me. On the other hand, maybe if I had my health back, I would squander it in some way that might drive me apart from you, forever."

This is how it goes with us. I don't know what I need today because I don't know what storms will break over my head tomorrow. It's absurd to insist on wealth when tomorrow I may be too sick to enjoy it, when instead I may need stronger faith, a humble spirit of obedience, greater patience and courage. In this earthly life it is difficult to know, apart from the obvious commandments, what God's will for us each day might be. Like little children we're often quite certain in our own minds of what we want – even convinced that what we want is what God should want, too. But as with little children, we often want the wrong thing – and only our Father knows what is truly the good thing – this Father who loves us – who sent his Son to save us.

So to this Father who loves us more than we love ourselves, who understands us better than we understand ourselves, who sees clearly the whole picture of our lives instead of only a few pieces of the puzzle that we see, to this Father we can gladly give up the course of our lives. What a burden is lifted from us when we put everything into the hands of our Savior who *knows* what is best for us, who *wants* what is best for us, and who has promised to *do* what is best for us. "**Lord, if you are willing, you can...**" This is the prayer of faith that never fails. Never.

Now this petition "**Thy will be done...**" becomes a great comfort. Here we learn that what happens to us in life is not just one random event after another. There is a higher hand at work. One infinitely wiser who will do just the right thing at just the right time in just the right way for all his children.

As I mentioned earlier, he who taught us to pray "**Thy will be done**" lived this trust out in own life. In the shadows of Gethsemane beneath the full Passover moon, he who became our brother – he, too, wrestled with the hard will of the Father. It seemed so unfair – that he, the innocent Son of God, should go to the cross and bitter death while all of us, the guilty, should go out into the sunshine of life and freedom forever. Here, he who loved us set aside everything to harmonize his heart with the heart of his Father and drink the cup of death and hell in our place. In so doing, God's will was done. God's perfect will was fulfilled in regard to the Law – every sin was justly punished as Jesus died in our place. And here God's perfect will was fulfilled in regard to his mercy – a perfect pardon was signed in the blood of God himself.

"How is God's will done?" asks Luther in the Catechism: "God's will is done when he breaks and defeats every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh which try to prevent us from keeping God's name holy and letting his kingdom come. And God's will is done when he strengthens and keeps us firm in his word and in the faith as long as we live. This is his good and gracious will."

This will was done, in Gethsemane, on Calvary, in the garden on Easter morning – and from the Mount of Ascension where Christ promised to come again and take us to himself. This will is done still when the Holy Spirit brings us to trust what Christ has done for us. That's the whole point of our time of grace, our pilgrim sojourn here below, isn't it? To get home to God. If you keep that purpose in mind, then the things that happen here can make a little more sense. It's not about a peaceful life here and a quiet retirement. It's all and it's only about getting you from here to eternity with God. It's what God wants. It is what we want, too.

Now before we finish today let's not miss the second half of this petition: "**Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.**" Here Jesus teaches us to ask that our Father's will may be done on earth, in our little space, as it is already and always done in heaven where angels come and go at God's bidding. Here we're bound together with those who sing God's praises in heaven. We ask that we have that kind of heavenly peace now and we take comfort in knowing that it is a promise of a perfect peace to come then. This great peace wraps itself around the blood, sweat and tears of our lives. Here we find that the will of God is not a dangerous thing of which to be suspicious or fearful – but it is good and gracious, a far better will than our own which would only destroy us. Here Christ gives us what we have always wanted – the prayer that never fails – "**Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**" Within this petition is his promise to you: "Everything will be OK."

Amen.