

Pastor Chris Matthis
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Lenten Midweek Service
Wednesday, April 3rd, 2019

Sermon: “Your Will Be Done”

Text: Matthew 6:10b

Focus: God has a good plan and purpose for our lives.

Function: That they would trust God’s direction and provident care.

Structure: Text-Application

Locus: “The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also” (SC, 3rd Petition of the Lord’s Prayer).

“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10b, ESV).¹

“*What does this mean?* The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also.

“*How is God’s will done?* God’s will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God’s name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens us and keeps us firm in his Word and faith until we die. This is His good and gracious will” (SC, 3rd Petition of Lord’s Prayer).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. In the Lord’s Prayer, we ask that God’s will might be done *on earth* as it is in heaven. The implication of this prayer is startling, for it means that, ordinarily, God’s will is *not* done on earth. This assertion shocks and confounds us because God is omnipotent. How would the Almighty God not get what God wants?

But after the Fall into sin, God gave human beings entirely to ourselves. He abandoned us to our own wills. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, rejected the will of God when they ate from the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. “For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions” (Rom. 1:26). And, as Helmut Thielicke points out, there

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

is nothing as terrible as being given over to ourselves.² For “every intention of the thoughts of [humanity’s] heart [is] only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). Our doom is to have *our* way and *our* will instead of God’s Word. Without God’s Word we die. Without his good and gracious will, we find ourselves confined by sin and condemned to die. Put bluntly: we are slaves to our sinful nature until Christ comes into our hearts. The world is corrupt and subject to decay because of our sin, and so we find that we have wrought ruin upon ourselves (Rom. 8:18ff). God has given us over to our fate.

Floods, hurricanes, wildfires, and earthquakes; cancer, AIDS, and diabetes; genocide, domestic violence, adultery, divorce, mass shootings, abortion, and slavery—these are *not* the will of God. All manner of horror and terror upon the earth is the will of man, which we chose in the Garden in order to “be like gods, knowing good and evil.” Yes, we know evil. We are the workers of evil. The only thing that matters, according to that most satanic of all philosophers, Friedrich Nietzsche, is the will to power. Thus, without Christ, all hope is lost.

We have all kinds of pithy sayings for when life falls apart. “What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.” “Everything happens for a reason.” And, perhaps worst of all, “God doesn’t give you anything you can’t handle.” But these are fatalistic expressions devoid of any trace of God’s goodness and mercy.

Yet Luther repeatedly calls God’s will “the good and *gracious* will of God.” The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in love (Ex. 34:6). He is not malevolent, capricious, or impotent. So we must pray for the Father’s will to be done down here *on* earth—just as it is in heaven.

² Helmut Thielicke, *Our Heavenly Father: Sermons on the Lord’s Prayer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960).

During his earthly ministry, Jesus told his disciples, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work” (John 4:34). In other words, Jesus lived to do God’s will. His very life depended on it. Where we arrogantly assert ourselves, Jesus emptied himself and became nothing so that he could accomplish our salvation on the cross (cf. Phil. 2:5-11). Christ knew that his suffering and death would bring terrible pain and punishment upon him. He would suffer God’s wrath for the sake of all humanity. To break our chains and free us from sin, he himself would be tied and nailed down to a criminal’s cross. He would die our death.

Jesus Christ was the sinless Son of God, but he was also a human being. The thought of such suffering was too much to bear. So he prayed in the Garden, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). Jesus prayed this petition: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Jesus prayed that God’s will be done *in* him. And for that to happen, he had to die.

Death on the cross was the worst imaginable ordeal. But Jesus did it willing *for you*. By his crucifixion and resurrection, he turns curse into blessing and death into life. The cross subverts our wicked will and brings about God’s good and gracious will *here on earth*—as it is in heaven. For what God wants and wills for you is your salvation. “For this is the will of my Father,” Jesus says, “that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:40).

Because Jesus endured the ultimate evil for us, we can trust that he wills our ultimate good. No matter what happens in life, we “we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Notice that the Scripture doesn’t say that everything that happens *is* good; but rather, God *works* it for our good. Certainly, it was not good that the patriarch Joseph was abused and betrayed by his

brothers and sold into slavery in Egypt. Yet, through the strange turnings of grace, God saved millions of lives from famine through Joseph's trials, tribulations, and rise to power. As Joseph later told his brothers, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen. 50:20).

It's never good that your loved ones die or you get cancer or that wicked men come to power in our country or state. God does not will evil. *His* "will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature...; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in his Word and faith until we die. *This* is His good and gracious will" (SC, 3rd Petition).

God's will is to save you from this wretched world by giving you faith to believe in his Son. And though trials come our way, Christ is with us always, "to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11).

*The will of God is good and wise,
Though it be hidden from our eyes.
And when the new creation breaks,
At last we'll know the good he makes.*³

So together we pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.

³ My verse is inspired by the hymn, "The Will of God Is Always Best," *LSB* 758, by Albrecht von Preussen.