

**Your Will Be Done**  
(Lord, Teach Us to Pray, Part 4)

Mark 3:31-35; Matthew 26:36-46

[A sermon preached by the Rev. Stan Gockel at the First  
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I

*"Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."* (Matthew 6:10b)

The third petition of the Lord's Prayer is the climax of the first half of the prayer.

Previously we have prayed that God's name would be hallowed in all that we say and do, and that God's kingdom of love and power would be manifest in our lives and in our world.

Now God's name and God's kingdom rise to a crescendo as we pray that God's will would be done on earth as in heaven.

Too often we are conditioned to think of prayer as asking God for what we want—  
*Dear God, give me this, give me that.*

But now, in praying that God's will be done on earth as in heaven,  
we are attempting to school ourselves to want what God wants.

We receive not what our hearts desire,  
but rather we become so enthralled with a vision of what God is doing on  
earth and in heaven,  
that we forget the story the world has told us—  
that we have nothing better to do on this earth  
than to satisfy our own desires.

A farmer cut the words "Thy will be done" into the weather vane on top of  
his barn.

A cynical neighbor asked,  
"Does that mean that our obedience is as fickle as the wind?"

"No," said the farmer, "it means that whatever the wind or the weather, we must do his will."

## II

It is important to note that the two petitions, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done," are parallel statements.

One of the most common characteristics of Hebrew poetry is *parallelism*, where the second phrase amplifies and elaborates on the first.

For example, in Psalm 121 we read,

*He will not let your foot be moved;  
he who keeps you will not slumber.  
He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.*

The second phrase elaborates on the first, and the third phrase amplifies and elaborates even further.

Another example is in Psalm 23:

*"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.  
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,  
He leadeth me beside the still waters."*

And so in the Lord's Prayer—

*"Thy will be done"* amplifies and explains the phrase that comes before—  
*"Thy kingdom come."*

And it stands to reason that if God's kingdom is in the process of coming, then it must be God's will that's driving it.

Of course, we wish it weren't because we would rather pray

*"My will be done"* than *"Thy will be done."*

When we pray "Thy will be done," we are not asking that events and circumstances in our lives always turn out the way we want them to.

We are praying, rather, that God would be God and that the highest priority of our lives would be the coming of God's kingdom and the seeking of God's will.

There is the closest possible connection between God's will and God's kingdom.

To be part of the kingdom is to obey the will of God.

As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount—

*"Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."*

The first letter of John echoes the same thought:

*"The one who does the will of God abides forever."*

It is not possible to separate the prayer, "Thy will be done" from "thy kingdom come."

You pray both of them, or you pray neither of them.

You pray them not just for yourself,  
for your personal life,  
but for the world as well.

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,**

And in the literal Greek this phrase: **as in heaven, so on earth.**

The prayer expresses God's intention that the conditions of heaven—  
peace...

harmony...

justice...

love...

compassion...

wholeness—

would come to pass on earth also.

**The kingdom of God is present whenever and wherever God's will is done on earth as in heaven.**

## III

Doing the will of God was at the heart of Jesus' life and ministry.

To his disciples who went in search of food and returned to find him talking to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) he said:

*"My food is to do the will of the One who sent me."*

To the multitudes who came in search of another miracle feeding he said, "I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me."

Kneeling in the garden with the shadow of the cross obscuring the fullness of the Passover moon, Jesus prayed:

*"My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."*

And Jesus said that those who would be children of the Father,  
 those who would be in an intimate relationship with God—  
 a relationship as close as sister and brother,  
 as close as parent and child—  
 would be those who do the will of God.

The words that Jesus taught us to pray are the same words he spoke alone in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Of those words a poet has said:

*No greater words than these  
 Can pass from human lips,  
 Than these which rent  
 Their way through agony and bloody sweat,  
 And broke the silence of Gethsemane  
 To save the world from sin.*

*"Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."*

## IV

Now if it is true that, "No greater words than these can pass from human lips," then we must consider what it means for us to pray this third petition of the Lord's Prayer.

It is important to understand that this prayer can be prayed in any number of ways,  
 with any number of meanings—  
 even with opposite meanings—  
 depending on a person's tone of voice  
 and the feeling in one's heart.

"Thy will be done" can be prayed in a tone of **bitter resentment**.

It can be the statement of one who is filled with anger and bitterness towards God  
 for how that person's life has turned out,  
 for the problems, trials, and defeats one has been forced to endure.

The great composer Beethoven was one whose entire life pulsed with the beauty  
 and power of music.

What a terrible fate it was for one so gifted to lose his hearing completely.

It is said that when Beethoven was found dead his fists were clenched as if to  
 strike God and his lips were drawn back in a snarl as though he would spit his  
 bitterness at the Almighty.

In the Academy Award-winning movie, *Amadeus*, Antonio Salieri becomes so  
 angry and bitter towards God because the impish, foul-mouthed, immature brat  
 name Mozart has such a wonderful gift for music.

Compared to the genius of Mozart, Salieri is at best a mediocre composer.

So in an angry act of defiance, Salieri throws the symbol of his devotion to God—  
 his crucifix—  
 into the fire, and sets out to destroy his rival.

There are many people like Beethoven, like Salieri—  
 perhaps some here today—  
 who know quite well they must accept the misfortunes of life,  
 but who blame God for it,  
 and who spend their lives in bitter resentment  
 at having to do so.

## V

"Thy will be done" can be prayed in a tone of **defeated resignation**.

Such people resign themselves to their situation because they have no other choice but to admit defeat.

The Roman emperor Julian is known as the one who tried to turn the clock back.

Called Julian the Apostate, he attempted to reverse the direction Constantine had established when he made Christianity the religion of the empire. Julian sought to return Rome to the ceremonies and worship of the pantheon of gods.

Historians tell us that Julian was mortally wounded in battle.

As he lay bleeding to death on the battlefield,  
     he flung a handful of his own blood into the air saying,  
     "You have conquered, O man of Galilee."

It is not so much that he submitted,  
     but that he wearily accepted defeat because there was no other choice.

There is indeed an acceptance of the will of God that is completely joyless...  
     it is tired and weary and defeated.

It is resigned to the fact that things must be as they are,  
     and nothing can be done to change it.

## VI

"Thy will be done" can be prayed in a tone of **passive acceptance**.

This is the person who hears of a tragedy—  
     the infant who dies of a sudden illness,  
     the teenager who commits suicide,  
     the family killed by a drunk driver,  
     the adult in the prime of life struck down by cancer—  
     and says, "It must have been God's will."

Such a person passively accepts all events,  
     both good and bad,

as coming from the hand of a capricious God.

For some people, saying “It must have been God’s will,” is the only way they know to cope with a tragic situation.

Praying, "Thy will be done" can sometimes be a way of escape from reality rather than a means of accepting reality,  
the good as well as the bad.

Last month in my sermons on “Half-Truths, Things You Only Thought Were in the Bible,” I told you about the car accident death by drowning of the twenty-three year old son of the Rev. William Sloane Coffin, at that time the senior minister of the Riverside Church in New York City.

On his first Sunday back in the pulpit after the funeral, Dr. Coffin preached a now-classic sermon entitled, "My Son Beat Me to the Grave." In the sermon he said:

*"The one thing that should never be said when someone dies is, 'It is the will of God.' Never do we know enough to say that. My own consolation lies in knowing that it was not the will of God that Alex die; that when the waves closed over the sinking car, God's heart was the first of all of our hearts to break."*

So we must always beware of praying "thy will be done" in a tone of passive acceptance,  
as though God willed every tragic event that has ever happened.

## VII

There is yet a fourth way that one can pray "thy will be done."

It can be prayed in a tone of **active faith** and **trusting love**.

This is the tone of the person who believes that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."  
(Rom. 8:28)

This is the bold conviction that a good and loving God promises never to leave us or forsake us and will give us the strength to endure every trial.

It means knowing, as the Apostle Paul learned, that God's grace is sufficient for us, for God's power is made perfect in our weakness. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

This is the victorious faith of Paul, who wrote to the Christians in Rome that...

*"...neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:38-39)

This is the tone of Dr. Coffin, who concluded that sermon at the Riverside Church with these inspiring words:

*"I know that when my son beat me to the grave, the finish line was not Boston Harbor in the middle of the night. If...a lamp went out, it was because, for him at least, the Dawn had come. So I shall—so let us all—seek consolation in that love which never dies and find peace in the dazzling grace that always is."*

To pray "thy will be done" in this way is to confess that God has a will for each of our lives.

Now, I don't mean this in a frivolous way—  
 where we are always looking for God's will as to  
 what clothes to put on in the morning,  
 what entree to order from the restaurant menu,  
 what bank to put our money in,  
 or what kind of car to buy.

Not like the business executive who decided it was time to shed some pounds. He was so serious about it that he even changed his driving habits so that he would avoid driving past his favorite bakery.

One day he walked into the office carrying a box of donuts. His co-workers scolded him about it, but he smiled and said,

*"These are special donuts...I accidentally drove by the bakery this morning and there in the window was a whole host of goodies. So I prayed, 'Lord, if it is your will for me to have those donuts, let me find a parking place right*

in front of the bakery.' And sure enough, the eighth time around the block, there it was.”

The fact that God has a will for our lives and for our world is affirmed on every page of Holy Scripture.

Genesis 1 says we are created in the image of God and given responsible for the nurture and care of God’s creation.

The Apostle Paul calls us “heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.”

John the Apostle wrote, *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves knows God and is born of God...for God is love.”* (1 John 4:7-8)

**God’s will is that we become the generous, loving people he created us to be.**

But at the same time, God grants us the freedom to accept or reject God’s will for our lives, and also to accept or reject our responsibility for God’s world.

Our highest calling is not only to seek to do God’s will in our lives,  
but also to labor to bring about...

the honoring of God’s name,  
the coming of God’s kingdom,  
the doing of God’s will,  
as in heaven, so on earth.

## VIII

So, I ask you this morning, how do you pray these words, "Thy will be done"?

Do you pray these words in a tone of active faith and trusting love?

Or is your prayer one of bitter resentment,  
defeated resignation,  
or passive acceptance?

As William Carl writes:

*“Living in the will of God...means faithfulness and perseverance in our*

*pilgrimage; it means journeying to a destination rather than being pushed in whatever direction the winds of society or peer pressure blow...Living in the will of God means prolonged obedience in the same direction. God's will provides for us an organizing center around which we can build long and happy lives."*

*Take my life and let it be  
Consecrate, Lord, to thee.*

*Take my will and make it thine;  
It shall be no longer mine.*

"Thy will be done" for today and for every day of our lives.

The question is not, can you say it?

The question is, **will you say it...  
and will you live it?**

Amen.

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