

Hope Lutheran Church
Lenten Sermon, March 26, 2014
Pastor Larry Lineberger
“Thy Will Be Done”

The Gospels allude to the prayer life of Jesus many times. He was no stranger to intimate conversation with his heavenly Father. On numerous occasions he retreats from the pressures of his ministry to be alone in prayer and meditation.

But the image of Jesus praying in Gethsemene is different. It is especially poignant and powerful. It is the only time we are given a vivid, verbal account of his prayer. And the emotion, the intensity is so striking; sweat falling like great drops of blood. It is a **very human Jesus** that we see kneeling in the Garden. We don't know how long he prayed but the circumstance and the substance of the prayer is well-defined. The cross looms before him. The word Gethsemene means “oil press.” Great pressure is required to extract the precious oil from the olives. It seems appropriate as we think about the great pressure, the weight that was accumulating on the shoulders of Jesus. It appears that he might buckle under and crumble. He knew what a Roman crucifixion was about. He knew what happened when crude nails were pounded into human flesh, when macho soldiers would scorn and mock their victims, stripping them of their clothes and their dignity. He knew it all too well, and he wanted no part of it. No wonder that he pleaded with his Father, “*let this cup pass...please find another way.*” But then, in an ultimate act of submission, he prays, “*Thy will be done!*” “*I know what I want, but I will gladly do what you want.*”

I find it very interesting that the Gospel writers include the little detail that while **Jesus was struggling in prayer, the disciples were snoozing**. It seems so apropos when we think about the nonchalant manner in which we repeat this phrase, “*Thy will be done*” when we recite the Lord's Prayer. Yes, I'm afraid that what we do most of the time, **we recite it, we don't pray it**. Like the disciples, we don't really understand or appreciate what it being said. We basically snooze through it.

It's not really surprising, I suppose. When people deny and try to avoid uncomfortable things they often sleep a lot. It's one of the symptoms of depression. And without faith and insight, it is terribly difficult and rather depressing to pray, “*Thy will be done.*”

Our problem, **our malady, runs in two directions**: On the one hand, we tend to think fatalistically. We pray with resignation, “*Thy will be done.*” What we are saying is, “*Lord, I can't lick you so I may as well join you.*” I wanted things my way, but it is obvious that they are not turning out the way I wanted, so I guess I'll just have to concede and turn it over to you. I acknowledge that you have a lot more clout than I have. It makes no sense to fight it. You win. Do it your way. I don't like it, but I don't really have a choice, do I? Just help me not to grumble too much about the way things are going. “*Thy will be done.*”

In this posture we come to the Lord like whipped puppies, cowering before His omnipotence, hoping for the ability to endure whatever it is that the Great Unknown is going to leave at my

doorstep. It is not a prayer of faith and confidence but of reluctant submission, with a heavy dose of bitterness. No wonder we sleep through it.

The other side of the problem, the other reason we tend to sleep through this petition, is our deep **awareness that God's will is often going to be in conflict with our own will**. We really don't want to pray this way because we already know what we want, and we don't want God's will to get in the way. The tough part of this petition is that for the most part we already know what God's will is for us. I'm afraid that many times we pray this prayer, "Lord, show me your will. Let your will be done." But we are not really asking for direction. Deep down, we are seeking affirmation! "*Please, Lord, let you will agree with mine. Please let me do the thing I want to do without feeling guilty.*"

It is very hard for us to "come clean" with this... to admit that we are not really ready to submit to his will, we just want him to bless the decision we have already made. When that kind of duplicity gets up on the surface it's not very pretty. We are sorely tempted to ignore God's will, so we just bail out. We sleep through it. We say the words, but we don't really want to think about it.

It's **really two sides of the same coin**. At the root of both these problems is a lack of trust that God's will is good and gracious. This is the leap of faith. **The real question is, "What do you believe about the will of God?"**

Do you think it is God's will that you suffer a lot? That you should not experience wholeness and joy in this life? Do you think God watches us experience loss and pain and says to himself, "*Well, maybe that will make them think twice about taking me lightly?*" Is it God's will that we squirm under his omnipotent, mysterious rule? Like battered children cringing before a cruel parent, never knowing whether the outstretched hand will bring a hug or a slap? Is this the way God wants us to live our lives? Is this God's will for us?

OR...do we truly believe that God's will for us is good and gracious? Do you remember the story Jesus told about **the prodigal son**? How this young man imposed his will upon his father, took his inheritance in advance and wasted it all in flagrant disobedience to his father's will, and yet, when he came to his senses and crawled humbly back home, his father opened his arms wide with compassion and forgiveness and throws a big party, inviting all, even the jealous elder brother to share in the festivities. Does this sound like a father whose will for us is hostile and punitive? A father who can't be trusted? Certainly not.

This is **Luther's confidence** when he comments on this petition in the catechism. He says, "*The will of God is done indeed without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also.*" Luther would argue that the problem is not the seemingly capricious and inscrutable will of God, but our resistance to his good and gracious will, our lack of faith, our unwillingness to come home from the far country and trust that his will for us is good. Trust that he is kindly disposed toward us in every circumstance!

Sounds good, but how can we be so sure? How do we know that God's will for us is good and gracious? **Simply because he has revealed his will to us in that journey from**

Gethsemene to Golgatha. The cross is God's will in action. Jesus resisted the temptation to escape the crown of thorns, the bitter vinegar, the stripes and the nails. He trusted that the will of the Father was good and gracious, no matter how painful the journey. It was all part of God's plan. God so loved the world! *If God spared not his Son, but gave Him up freely for us all, shall He not also freely give us all things?* Every time you look at that cross you should say, *"This is why I know that God's will for me is good and gracious, God's plan for me may run thru some rough waters, but the secure harbor is never in doubt!"*

This is why we can make our pilgrimage through life with confidence and trust. This is what helps us through the really tough decisions and a problematic circumstance, when we want to do God's will but are unsure of our step.

Be at ease! Worry not! The issue is not so much the decision or the circumstance, but the submission, the trust that God's gracious will is at work in your life. With this trust we can say, *"Father, there is nothing here that you and I can't handle together. I know that your will for me is good, and you will sustain me in every circumstance!"*

May this be the prayer of every pilgrim here tonight, ***"Lord, let my stubborn, questioning, resistant will be silenced. Guide my decisions and guard me from doubt. Point me toward your cross, where you prove to me that your will for me is good and gracious. I trust you, Lord Jesus. Your will be done!"*** Amen.