

Today we pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." So, what is that will exactly? What is this will of God that we want done on earth as it is in heaven?

Well, on the one hand, there are some voices that say that the will of God is the wrath of God. I'm sure you've seen these people—they're the ones who picket and protest, wielding signs as if they were weapons. They have no trouble using God's Law to beat others over the head. Their messages say things like "God hates [such-and-such]" or "All [fill-in-the-blanks] are going to hell." Ask them why they do it and they might say, "It's about time someone stands up for the truth" or "I'm just tellin' it like it is." For them, the will of God is the wrath of God.

Then, on the other hand, there are voices that say the will of God is the love of God. You know these people too—I'm sure you've driven by their churches. They don't wield signs like weapons, but unfurl their banners like open arms. Those banners might be bright and colorful, affirming "Everyone is welcome" or "Come as you are." For them, the Law is *out* and love is *in*—after all, Jesus taught us to love one another, didn't He? For them, the will of God is the love of God.

So, which is right—the wrath of God or the love of God? Would you say you tend to stand on one side more than the other? Does your voice blend in with either chorus? I wonder which is in sync with our Lord's voice. Would He say His will is one of wrath or one of love? Well, let's ask Him.

In John chapter eight, we get an angry mob of picketers. While Jesus is teaching a crowd, they come storming up clutching a woman. You can see the fear in her eyes as they announce to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The Law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?" For them, the will of God is the wrath of God. But does their voice match His pitch, or are they horribly out of key?

Without saying a word yet, Jesus gets up and silently writes in the dust. "Enough playing around," they shout, "give us an answer!" So Jesus stands up and says, "Okay, alright, *sure* . . . but let the one who's never sinned throw the first stone." After that, they all drop their stones and go home, leaving Jesus standing there with the woman. "Woman," He says, "what happened to your accusers—doesn't even *one* of them accuse you?" "No," she responds meekly. Then, Jesus says, "Neither do I." Is the will of God the wrath of God? Doesn't sound like it.

So that means the will of God must be the love of God, right? Well, as the flag wavers move in, ready to welcome the woman and hi five Jesus . . . they get a surprise. They expect Him to be all-embracing, tolerant, accepting, inclusive, and affirming . . . but Jesus doesn't do that. Just because He loves her, doesn't mean He loves her sin. He doesn't condone her behavior, accepting her just the way she is. We don't hear Him say, "God loves you for who you are. Please don't ever change—you're perfect!" Nor do we hear Him say, "'Atta girl! Keep up that adultery! As long as it makes you happy." No, instead there's a call to change, a charge to repent. She might be let off the hook, but He still tells her, "Go, and sin no more" . . . "*sin no more*." And maybe that's enough to make the spirits of the flag wavers begin to sag and their banners drag on the ground. Is the will of God the love of God? Not how some folks define it.

The wrath of God on the one hand and the love of God on the other—we hear them each in the Bible. We know God has a lot to say about both wrath and love, but pushed to the extremes . . . we don't find Thy will being done on earth as it is in heaven . . . so much as our own wills being done. You see, on the one hand, we like the wrath of God. I know it sounds funny, but we love judging, making comparisons, seeing how we measure up to others. We feel good about ourselves when we think, *Well, at least I'm not as bad as so-and-so. Man, compared to them, God must really be pretty happy with me.* See, we like to call the shots, control our relationship, force God to like us. But God refuses to let our self-centered, me-first will be His own. If He did, like the angry mob who went away with their tails between their legs, our own finger-pointing would only accuse us. Because for every one sin we point out, there's an endless list of offenses with our names on it. Good thing that's *not* God's will.

Then, on the other hand, we love the love of God. I mean, *If God loves us, we assure ourselves, then God loves everything about us.* No matter what we love He loves it too, He loves whatever makes us happy, He would never stand in the way of our dreams. But God refuses to confuse our own selfish, egotistical wills with His. See, the Bible has names for what we love, what makes us happy, what we dream about. Too often, those things also go by idolatry, lust, greed, pride, covetousness. We can try to repackage them and call them what we want, but in the end they are roadblocks between us and God, standing in the way of His best for us. And knowing this, if God did let us get our self-destructive way, should we still call Him loving? Or instead, what might we call Him—maybe sick, twisted, sadistic, cruel, heartless? Good thing that's *not* God's will either.

So, now that we know what the will of God is *not*, how do we know what it *is*? Well, instead of listening to either *this* voice on the one hand or *that* voice on the other, let's listen to God speak for Himself. While you and I are going back and forth about what God's will even is, Luther points out that "The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer." Turning our attention away from our own wills, we actually get a glimpse of God's will being done. Each of us finds Jesus Christ praying in a Garden called Gethsemane. The hour is late, He can't sleep—not with the big day tomorrow. In fact, tomorrow is such a big day, it's got Him sweating bullets—or rather, blood. Watching His lips move, we barely make out His whispers as His eyes scan the heavens. He's praying, "O Father, if possible, let this cup pass away from Me. Nevertheless, not My will be done, but Thy will be done."

God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven in the cross of Jesus. In the Gospel this morning, Jesus explains, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given Me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, 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." When Jesus says that the will of His Father is that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, He means everyone who takes in His crucifixion by faith. Because it is there that God's wrath is poured out not on sinners but rather on His own Son. And it is there that God doesn't wink at sin—what our culture often mistakes for love—but instead does what is truly loving, He forgives that sin and frees us from it. By the selfless, gracious, compassionate act of Jesus Christ, God's cross-shaped will is done on earth as it is in heaven. You and I are saved from our sins, and given eternal life.

Because we are saved from our sin, "the good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we also pray in this petition that it may be done among us also." You see, we aren't just saved *from* sin, but we are saved *for* something better. We are saved to join Christ in carrying out God's will on earth as it is in heaven, to be instruments of His grace. We know this to be true as we, ourselves, are made cruciform to match His cross-shaped will.

Think about it, God has traced the cross over you in Baptism, God shares the fruits of the cross with you in His Holy Supper, and God declares the benefits of the cross to you through the Gospel. His cross-shaped will has given us cruciform lives that carry out His will among us also. It's even written in our bodies—feet together, arms out, we look just like Latin crosses! Every day, like Jesus, we crucify our sin—our selfish passions and desires—and we live for the care and needs of others. When we do that, our life is conformed to the gracious, saving will of our Lord. You and I share His heart, and take part in His big plan for the world of abundant life and salvation. That's what happens when you volunteer at church, take care of your kids at home, do a good job at work, show courtesy to other drivers on the road, play a role in the community—in all these things, you and I live cruciform lives in service to others, and God's will is done among us.

The Bible never tells us what happens to the woman caught in adultery after her encounter with Jesus. But after such a brush with grace, it's hard to imagine she either went back to adultery or merely faded into the background. I wonder if we would've found her among the bystanders at Calvary, weeping over the One who showed her mercy like never before. Or maybe she would've been in the crowd on Pentecost, hearing about how Christ had come to be her own personal Savior. Perhaps she even became one of the untold stories in the early Church, one of the movers and shakers who took care of the poor, reached out to the outcast, shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ with anyone who would listen.

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Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer

Cf. John 6:35-40

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My guess is, whatever she did, she was never the same again. Her old life was crucified and now she was conformed to the image of her Savior—doing the will of God on earth as it is in heaven.

This morning, there are people in this room, people who have a story to tell just like that woman. People who have been so touched by God's grace—the Father's will carried out for them in His Son's cross—that their only prayer is "Not my will be done, but Thy will be done." If that's you, God has already answered that prayer in your life. Like that woman, you are different, changed, forever charged with a new purpose. And thanks to you—dying to self and living for God, getting out of His way so our Lord's will can be done—earth looks more and more like heaven every day. May you be instruments of His grace!