

Sermon Text for February 16, 2020

by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Proverbs 19:20-23, Acts 21: 7-14

“Thy Will be Done”

This week was a pretty significant week, a lot happened in a variety of different areas. Last Sunday right after worship I left as quickly as I could to head to Galloway, NJ to meet two more of my brothers. We went to a retirement celebration of a guy named Big Al, maybe you remember me mentioning him in the past. He was my youth group leader from the age of about 10 up to even now. In 1986 on January 14 I heard the voice of God because of this man and I gave my life over to Jesus Christ to serve him and to do His will as much as I would be able to do it through the power of the Holy Spirit. We walked into the gym and there were over a thousand people whose lives he had touched. He wasn't famous, no one is going to write a book about him, but he touched all of our lives in a significant, life altering way.

After the celebration my brothers and I went back to our old stomping grounds in Ventnor, NJ and Atlantic City where we used to play tennis and basketball and retold stories of what it was like growing up on the Jersey Shore. We spoke about how God had touched our lives each in a unique and powerful way while we were living there. We relived some of the competition that had been a part of our lives, and still to this day remains a part of our lives. I saw this video and I thought of us growing up. I would have been the baby and my brother John would have been the one who knocked me over. Mom was not excited about what happened.

Today we try to understand the Will of God and we find the greatest challenge isn't following the will of God, but rather discerning, or understanding, finding out what the will of God is in the midst of pressures and the competing demands on our life. If someone were just to tell us clearly what the will of God might be for our life then I think we would find ourselves following it more easily.

Both of our Scriptures contain a struggle to discern and discover and then enact the will of God. The enacting isn't normally the difficult part, but rather the discerning and discovering of it is what is difficult. Let's read.

READ

The title for our sermon today is Thy Will be Done which comes straight out of a line from our Lord's prayer which we say every Sunday. We aren't asking in general that God's will

be done, but I think we are asking specifically that we would be given the strength to enact, to live out your will. And that is fine, we genuinely mean that we want to live out God's will. But in that statement we leave out the hardest part of God's will and that is discerning what the will of God might be. When we look at Proverbs we see a King, King Solomon, passing on wisdom down to his son who one day will also be king. He tells his son in vs.21 that we are really good at coming up with our own plans, the human mind may devise many plans, but if God is not a part of those plans then things can and probably will go horribly wrong.

The only way that we can know what God's will is for our life, he continues in vs.23, is if we fear God, is if we know God, is if we have a relationship with God. We cannot know the will of God in our life if we do not have a relationship with God. Our goal here at First Presbyterian Church is to make it so that every single person who walks through these doors will leave having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This relationship provides salvation to eternal life. This relationship also provides us with a deeper understanding of what God's will in our life might be so that we can live it out. Trying to live your life without the presence of God and without a daily interaction with God is no way to live a life. It will inevitably lead to living a life outside of the will of God.

There are those who tried living outside of the will of God in Scripture. Remember the prodigal son who one day woke up in a pig pen and realized that he was living out of the will of God so came back to be embraced. Remember Jonah who woke up in the belly of a whale and realized that he was not living within the will of God and that it was time to get back to where God wanted him to be? It is our desire, it is our wish to be in the will of God. Once we know that we are in it then more likely than not we can live a life that ought to be consistently pursuing it. But how do we know the will of God?

Let's look at Paul today and see how he lives in the will of God, and we will see that it is not a linear path as we would like it to be. We find Paul still making his way toward Jerusalem but today he is in a town called Caesarea and in Caesarea is someone that we met earlier, remember Philip from chapter 6 who was one of the people along with Stephen and others, to serve those Greek widows who were being overlooked in favor of the Jewish widows. Remember that was when this whole ministry of the deacons started. Well, he's older and married and has four daughters and living in Caesarea. He is what over these past two weeks has

come into vogue, a girl dad. Kobie Bryant's passing made that hash tag popular since he was a girl dad, I'm a girl dad.

His girls were respected and well known prophets who spoke the word of God to the community. While Paul was staying in Philip's house another prophet came down and foretold how Paul would be imprisoned and bound if he were to go to Jerusalem. So there are a lot of people in this story who are laying claim to the Word of God and a lot of people, also among his friends, who are telling Paul what God's will is and what he should and should not do. At the top of their list, at least at the top of the list of Paul's friends, is to try to prevent Paul from going to Jerusalem because everyone was convinced that this would be where he would be arrested and possibly put to death.

But Paul, as we read in vs.13 has the last word and tells his friends stop trying to prevent me from doing the Will of God. If my going to Jerusalem will put me in harm's way then this is what God's will is going to be. Stop making it difficult for me, he is basically saying, to discern the will of God just because you are sad because selfishly you will be missing me if by chance I happen to be arrested. "For I am ready not only to be bound but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." His friends were silenced and could only respond: The Lord's will be done.

What we find here is a conflict with what we want and with what God's will might be. We are convinced, and theologically we are justified, in believing that God's will has to lead to something positive. This is our promise in Romans 8:28 when we hear that all things work for good for those who trust in the Lord. So if we rightly believe that God's will always leads to something positive, hold onto that people, then why does Katrina happen, or 9/11 or you choose your natural disaster or tragedy? This is why understanding God's will is so difficult because things happen that we have no answer for and no understanding in how in the world it can fit into God's will.

A pastor friend of mine told me of a young couple who were expecting their first baby and the husband had gone up into the attic to check on something because the wife just couldn't go up those narrow steps in the state she was in. She heard a thump and didn't realize that he had electrocuted himself in the attic and kept calling him and he wouldn't answer until she had to call a neighbor to ask him to go up and he found him dead by the current that went through him. It is in those moments that we as pastors do not have the answers. We know that God is able to

take a horrific situation and make something come out of it which is redeeming, but we don't have the answer to why.

I do know that God's will is always producing something positive, but we have free will in the midst of that, we have the ability to follow God's will or not follow God's will and things happen in life that align or don't align with God's will, but at the end of the day God's will is always positive. But the enormity of the one, God's will, transcends the capacity of the other, our understanding.

When we look at Paul in this Scripture we find him receiving conflicting messages which makes it even more difficult to discern God's will. Paul's friends were telling him not to go. Agabus was telling him what would happen if he did go, but not giving his opinion, and yet he was convinced through his prayer and his time with the Lord that he was supposed to go. It would be easier not to go, that is for sure. But we have to know that the statement Thy Will be done means allowing our lives to become an arena for the authority of God, no matter what it takes. The will of God would never purposefully bring about pain and suffering on any part of creation, we have to believe that for us and for those around us.

Bethany is home today because earlier last week she was concussed from ultimate frisbee. It is interesting that when you have a concussion there really isn't anything you can do but sit and be still and quiet. But we found that in a limited time frame putting together a puzzle is okay. Think of God as the one who knows what the puzzle is ultimately going to look like. He has the box in his hands, while we are just putting random pieces together without any idea of what the final product will be. But every now and then God says: try putting that piece in there. Sometimes we will, and sometimes we won't. Other times he won't even give us a choice and God will reach over and put one of the pieces in place for us.

In our lives we have a whole slew of competing demands in trying to discern what the will of God might be for us individually, or for us as a family, or for us as a church. We have spouses, parents, family members, friends and the list goes on, co-workers, who are trying to insert their own understanding of what is best for us, whether they frame it as the will of God or just the smart thing to do or not. It is seldom easy to separate divine revelation from human interpretation as it was for Paul in this Scripture.

We often find ourselves conflicted both internally and externally. When we are reticent to make God's will our default then quickly to replace it is "my will be done" which often wins

out and takes precedence. Just like Solomon warns his sons, we are able to come up with our own plans, but only one who loves God and is immersed in seeking out God's will will be able to discern the plans of God for their life. We will never escape the will of God, it does always win out. We are swimming in the will of God and we have to be able to allow ourselves the ability to surrender to it. If we try to fight it, it will still win out so why not try to understand it and follow it?

In our Scripture today Paul is able to face his coming suffering with confidence because of his assurance that in his life the will of the Lord will be done, as his friends recognize at the end. Our task is to seek people out who are themselves seeking out the will of God like Philip and Agabus. Their agenda was not to keep their movement safe, but rather their agenda was to do the will of God at all costs. We often weigh the costs and if they seem too much then the will of God in our limited understanding often takes the shape of what is the safest thing to do. That is not how God works. God wants to know what will bring the most people to a saving knowledge of Him, and that isn't always the safest course of action.

I hope you were blown away by Vladimir who came to speak on Thursday. His mother and father were policemen and in that country that is how you get your job, you pass it down from generation to generation. But he felt a calling in his life to be a pastor, even in a family of atheists. His father forbade him, but he was able to convince his father to travel with him to St. Petersburg to see the seminary so that he could see that he wasn't joining a cult, but just the Lutheran Church. When we pray Thy Will be done, we have to mean it and know that God's will is always for our good. Stay in the will of God, discern the will of God, and act according to the will of God even if it seems like your will might suffer. Amen.