

Sermon Text for August 9, 2020

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Genesis 45:4-9, Matthew 6:9-13

“Thy will be done”

There have been events in our history where it has been very difficult to discern the will of God in the midst of that event and in the repercussions which follow that event. When 9-11 struck we did not have a theological answer to the why it happened. Some pastors said God wanted it to happen to punish our country. When Katrina hit we did not have the answer to why God allowed, made, permitted, it to happen, but some pastors pointed to a punishing God for the misdeeds that we made. I am sure in the midst of this pandemic that there are some who comfortably are pointing their finger at God and justifying God, as if God needs to be justified, and stage this pandemic event which we have been experiencing as a clear punishment from God for one misdeed or another, or a national sin, as if the United States were the only country to be suffering from the pandemic.

In all of these events the question of what is the will of God and what in the world is God doing in the midst of these tragedies, or as some authors state: where is God in the midst of this, remains an open question. We do not have an answer to why. When bad things happen more often than not we do not have the answer to the question of why in relationship to God. But I can tell you that a punishing God and a God who takes delight in human suffering does not correspond to the God in Jesus Christ that I teach from this pulpit and that we read together in the Holy Scriptures.

Today we are going to look at the most difficult phrase in the entire prayer, Thy will be done, simply because it is so hard to discern God's will in exactly these types of situations and more specifically in the situation in which we find ourselves in this pandemic. Today's phrase ends a sequence of three Thy statements, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, and now today thy will be done. Following these thy statements in the prayer we will transition to Our statements.

While this may be the most difficult of the phrases to understand, what we do find in Scripture is that we are able to take the most tragic life events and provide a framework around them which gives us a foundation for us to understand the will of God, the ultimate will of God. Let's just say that we will find is that God's will for us, God's will for you today, yes even today, is always directed to our good, always. God is always for us, on our side, and if God is for us,

who can be against us? Do you believe that? Today we will have that truth reinforced by what we read. Let's read.

READ SCRIPTURE

The story of Joseph is the most powerful story in the Old Testament in understanding the will of God even in the midst of events that take place which are clearly not events which please God. You know the story of Joseph. The favorite son of Jacob who has a colorful coat that he made for him, even while his other brothers are jealous. They are so jealous that they sell him into slavery and pretend that he was killed. He goes on a slave caravan down to Egypt where he is bought by the captain of the guards who puts him in charge of his household. He is seduced, unsuccessful by the wife of the captain of the guards but not before she accuses him of rape and he is thrown in to prison.

While in prison he gets the opportunity to interpret the dream of pharaoh after some time wondering when his opportunity would come, and as a result of that interpretation he is made chief over the all of the strategic planning for the nation of Egypt, basically one below Pharaoh himself, he is for all intent and purposes the king of Egypt. His brotheres, who think he was long gone make their way to Egypt in order to find relief from the famine. Joseph plays with them for a while, trying to discern their hearts, until we find ourselves in the Scriptures that we picked up this morning. You have to have the stage set because the events of Joseph's life were, in a word, tragic. A slave wrongfully accused and thrown into prison who now has made it good. It seems like an individual success story, and it could have remained at that until we find him saying: vs. 5 – God sent me before you to preserve life, vs.7 – God sent me before you to keep you alive, vs. 8- It was not you who sent me here, but God.

When he reveals himself to them in the verses before this, look at vs.3, the brothers are dismayed. No kidding. Of course they were, the most powerful person on the face of the planet was their brother that they had sold into slavery. How is that going to work out? Joseph turns it around and tells them that even in the face of tragedy, my tragedy, my personal tragedy, God was able to turn so that good would happen not just to you, but for what would become the nation of Israel. Look at chapter 50:20 where he tells his family: Even though you intended to harm me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear.

From this we find the framework for what we will be seeing in regards to the will of God. The only way to see and think of the will of God is positively. God's will is always positive, it is always for the good. God is the one who repeatedly turn what others meant for evil into

something profoundly good. The hand of God is at work even in the midst of tragedy, a personal tragedy that then is able to be used for the good of a nation. The Joseph story is the clearest example of the will of God being done even when it clearly seems like the events that happen have to be out of God's will.

Joseph could easily have been killed in the midst of all these events. But his life was spared so that..., he would be in the head guards house, he would be in prison, he could interpret Pharaoh's dream, so that his father Jacob and his brothers could be protected. But Lord, can't you do it an easier way. Can't you just make it happen? But then where would our free will reside? We would be nothing more than puppets if God did all the work.

As we transition to our Lord's prayer in Matthew 6 and the phrase Thy will be done, we understand that this is the most difficult passage in the prayer for a couple of reasons, first it is difficult to discern God's particular will and secondly because it is difficult to do God's will. At each step along the way Joseph could have stepped outside of God's will. He could have fought his brothers, he could have submitted to the seduction, he could have despaired in prison, he could have sought his own glory instead of looking to save his family. But he continued to do the will of God once it was revealed to him.

This phrase that we find in the Lord's prayer needs to be interpreted more closely. Thy will be done means literally may what you desire materialize, happen. But what does God desire for us? Believe it or not we have that answer, again we find it in Scripture. As we said earlier we made a pronouncement that God's will and desire for us is always positive, is always good. Our Scripture tell sus this in Romans 8:28, All things work for good for those who trust in the Lord. Memory Scripture today. The only way to think of the will of God for us individually is to think positively.

So you are no longer allowed to say: God is punishing me. No, God is not punishing you. God only wants good for your life. So, if God only wants good for my life, how do I discern what exactly that good might be? How can I be sure that my actions reflect this goodness in my life? Throughout Scripture we find individuals trying different methods to discern the will of God: Gideon in Judges 6:37-40 puts down a fleece to understand what God wants in his life. David in II Samuel 5:23-24 asked for a sign and God gave it to him. We see the casting of lots as a method to discern the will of God in Leviticus, Joshua, Jonah, and Acts. Wee see the Urim and the Thummin in Numbers being used as a discerning method for the will of God. I am telling you that there is no method for discerning the will of God, it leads to idolatry.

So how do we discern the will of God? Well, if we know the will of God is always for our good, then hear what Paul says again in Romans which might help, Romans 12:2 – Do not seek out what the world wants, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds in Jesus Christ. Our wants and our desires do not disappear with this prayer, but the hope is that our desires and our wants become more in line with our needs for which God will provide. The beauty of the Christian life is to be able to see our desires align with God's desires.

Now keep in mind, while God's wishes for us are always good, it does not mean that we can break God's commandments with impunity. If we step outside of God's wishes, then there will be repercussions. If you try to defy gravity you are going to break something. If you eat wrong, smoke, drink too much, the odds are against you. At times we can draw a straight line between our actions and the tragedies and the not so good things that happen in our lives. At times we do have the answer why, because he didn't take care of himself. The laws of God remain in place.

If Joseph is the perfect example in the Old Testament of God's will being done even in the midst of events that certainly do not feel and seem like the will of God, let us give you the ultimate example. If you look at Luke 22:42 we hear our Savior in the Garden of Gethsemane asking that the cup be taken from him. That is his earthly, fleshly desire that he would not need to go through the pain and the suffering that he knew would be the road ahead of him. But without Jesus' tragic death, we would not have the freedom in Christ that we have now.

It was necessary for one man to die so that we could all be saved. If Christ is for us even in the midst of that lonesome road that he had to travel, then who can be against us? While we don't have an answer to the why question of why are we going through this at this time, why is the pandemic gripping our nation, we do have an answer to the for what purpose questions. What will result and what is the purpose of all that we are going through, what will the end result be? The answer is that it will work for good, for our good. All of this mess is for our good, or at least some good will come out of it.

Joseph told his brothers that all that happened to him was so that God could bring a miracle out of his life to save a nation. Jesus suffered and died so that God could bring salvation to humanity. Do we believe that there is some redeeming value in what we are going through? You may not feel it now, but can you believe that there is something to be learned as we go through this together? If your answer is no and you choose to cut yourself off and see this as an opportunity to enforce your own personal desires at the expense of God's desires then you will

miss the lesson that will be learned. You will also miss the good that can come out of this experience.

God is at work now to carry out his will, and we know that what God's will is that all thing would work for good for those who trust in him. Amen.