

Thy Will Be Done

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17; 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10; Matthew 26:36-46

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A Meditation for Ash Wednesday

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What do we mean when we say or pray, “Thy will be done”?

That is our theme for Lent this year. Thy will be done. We will pray it together each Sunday as we pray the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” They are not just words to be spit out from rote memory. They are more than a liturgical decoration for worship. When we pray those four words with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, they are the most powerful prayer we can utter.

They are the prayer of Jesus. Jesus was about to be betrayed by Judas. Then he would be arrested and go before Caiaphas, the high priest, who accused Jesus of blasphemy and turned him over to be crucified. Immediately before Judas arrived with a large crowd, Jesus went to a place called Gethsemane to pray. He took Peter, James, and John with him. He told them that he was deeply grieved, even unto death. He asked that they stay awake while he prayed. Alone he went further into Gethsemane and threw himself onto the ground and prayed,

My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.

The “cup” was the betrayal, the sentence by Caiaphas, the mockery, and his crucifixion. If this can pass from me, Lord, let it, Jesus was praying. Yet not what I want but what you want.

He returned to Peter, James, and John. They were sleeping. They could not stay awake while he prayed.

Jesus returned to Gethsemane again to pray. Do you hear resolution in his prayer? A sense of inevitability?

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

Peter, James, and John went to sleep again. So Jesus went into Gethsemane again, Matthew records, and prayed for the third time.

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

Shortly after that Judas arrived with a large crowd. He greeted Jesus with a kiss, the ultimate betrayal. God's will was being done.

As we pray those words over the next 40 days, note who we are addressing. *Thy* will be done. We are not asking for our will, that our children be okay, that our health is good, that our circumstances be favorable. *Thy* will be done. *Your* will be done.

It implies trust. That God knows better than we what is best for us and our children and in all of our circumstances. *Thy* will be done. Are you willing to pray that during Lent? Are you willing to relinquish your own will, your own desires, your own plans and give yourself to God instead? That is what we are praying when we pray, "*Thy* will be done."

Note also what we are requesting. That our plans, our will, all our intentions, become secondary to God's plans, God's will. "*Thy will* be done." Jesus honestly admitted that he wanted the cup to pass from him, that he somehow could escape Judas, Caiaphas, and that horrible crucifixion. Like any sane human being, Jesus' will was to avoid all the humiliation, abandonment, and pain.

But he prayed, "*Thy will* be done." Let me try to make a distinction here. God's will was not that Jesus be humiliated, abandoned, and put to death upon a cross. God's will was that Jesus be faithful to the way of the kingdom of heaven, the message of love and grace. By being faithful to God's will, Jesus placed himself into conflict with men, men who had an agenda, men who had a will. They imposed their will on Jesus, and it included humiliation, abandonment, and crucifixion. But that was man's will, not God's will. God's will was

complete faithfulness to the kingdom of heaven. Can we do that this Lenten season? Can we be completely faithful to the kingdom of heaven? That is what we are praying when we pray, “Thy *will* be done.”

Note one more thing: the outcome for which we pray. Thy will be *done*. We are asking for God’s will to be accomplished. Not just that we would believe in it, even with all our heart. Jesus did not pray to believe in God’s will, but that it be *done*.

Gene Sapp gave me a copy of a sermon delivered here in 1978. The preacher was Todd Wilson. The sermon title was, “Thy Will Be Done.” Near the end of the sermon, this is what Todd said,

God’s will is sometimes hard. It is never evil, but it is frequently tough. God’s desire is that we actualize our full potential—that we become the finest person which we are capable of becoming. Sometimes what is best for us in God’s eyes is not exactly what we desire or prefer. To follow God’s will, we may have to make some heartbreaking decisions, accept bitter disappointment, and make agonizing sacrifices. At such times we may even be tempted to pray Thy will be changed or not Thy will be but mine be done.

Todd ended the sermon this way,

However, once it really gets inside us that God’s will is the will of our Father, that He really loves us and knows what is best for us, that His desire is for us to experience fullness of life, then we will embrace His will with enthusiasm and excitement.

Thy will be done. That is our corporate prayer as we make this 40 day journey together. Let us pray it with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

A Prayer of Confession is printed in your worship guide. Please join me as we confess our sins.