

"Thy will be Done." We pray it, but often what we mean is more like, "**My** will be done." Or "Thy will be done—so long as it coincides with **mine**!" We sometimes treat God as a kind of genie who is supposed to change the universe just to give us what we want. However, as **Forest** Gump says: Life is "like a box of chocolates—you never know what you're going to get." God doesn't always give us what we want.

In Western consumer society, I am trained to think that getting what I want is the way to a fulfilled life. Yet the daily news tells us that the outcome of all this individual free choice is a growing rate of addiction, mental illness, depression and violence. It seems clear that we are not the best at knowing what is good for us, especially when we are being carried along by mass marketing that teaches us what to want. God doesn't always give us what we want—but that is truly a good thing.

Counter-culturally, the Bible tells us that real life and joy are not to be found in me getting what I want, but in me seeking what God wants—aka—Thy will be done. We come to God in prayer, not to change God's plans—but so that we might discover God's will and embrace **God's** plans—asking God to place in us a desire to want what the same things that God wants—and intentionally to move in that direction.

Seeking the will of the Father is at the very centre of Jesus' life and ministry. From beginning to end, the cornerstone of Jesus' mission is summed up in his prayer: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Jesus regularly seeks the will of the Father in prayer, speaks of this seeking in his teaching and parables, and demonstrates it himself—especially in his gut-wrenching prayer on the night of his betrayal and arrest at Gethsemane—"not my will but thine." In the midst of life, Jesus is not tugged around by others' demands and desires, or by his culture—his focus is steadily on one thing only—doing the will of the Father.

The "will" is the executive centre of the human self. "The Will" has to do with our ability to originate or bring things into existence—we are created to be creators—of goodness and beauty. The function of the will/or the heart is to organize our life as a whole and indeed to organize it around God. However, our hearts are often the playing fields of pride, fear and a lack of confidence in God—shrouded in layers of old destructive habits.

So our fallen will takes God's intention: "What good can I bring about?" and replaces it with, "How can I get my way?" Manipulation, deception, seduction and malice replace transparency, sincerity and good; exaltation of the self replaces submission and service to God. And the result is a duplicity—pretending to feel and think one way while acting in another—the very opposite of integrity. Often the deception involved is self-deception. Sometimes we seek God's blessing, while we live in our own will.

Kierkegaard said, "Purity of heart is to will one thing"—the single-minded pursuit of God's will. Notice in our Luke reading how Martha has become bothered and worried about many things—one thing is needful Jesus says. The first step toward identifying our will with the Father's will is surrender—consenting to God's supremacy in all things.

And what does God's will look like? Scripture is quite clear in this regard. In the Ten Commandments we hear what it means to embody that will—first and foremost love of God and second, love of neighbour. In fact that is how Jesus sums up the Will of the Father in our reading from Luke—which he then illustrates by his story of Mary's centred devotion to the Son—and the love of neighbour in the story of the Good Samaritan. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount goes further in fleshing out the details of how this cruciform love is enacted in the nitty gritty everyday practical situations of disagreements, marriage, encounters with the poor and the needy, our life of prayer and the anxiety that comes in everyday life. Jesus' own stunning act of washing his disciples feet just before they betray him illustrates in technicolour God's will to "Love one another as I have loved you." The will of the Father ambushes the natural tendencies

of self-centred love with the love summed up in the Fruit of the Spirit or in 1 Corinthians 13 or in Romans 12.

...But life can only be pulled together from the inside, with a change of the will. The first step is to overcome the duplicity and begin to do only what God wills. Even taking a step in this direction will quickly lead us into deeper spiritual formation. Once we take the initial step we greet the power of God right there to help us go farther than we thought possible. Our tiny “willpower” is not the source of our real strength. Instead we are carried along by the power of the Father who is always working his will in the world and longs to work with us and through us. The strongest human will is always the one that is surrendered to God’s will.

Johnny was a member of the congregation I served. After some hard knocks as a teenager he began to turn to alcohol for relief. Over time his alcoholism stained his work and family life with hurt and pain. Secretly, Johnny would try his hardest to quit, but then fall off the wagon and feel guilt that in God’s eyes he just wasn’t good enough. Then one day Johnny’s whole world came crashing down when he went off the road on his way to work—thankfully no other cars were involved. The breathalyzer showed him over the legal limit. He was charged, convicted and enrolled in a mandatory 20-day residential rehab program. It was during this “time-out” that Johnny finally realized that he had never truly surrendered his life to God and God’s will, but instead was always simply trying to live up to God’s standards on his own steam and will power. It was when it seemed that Johnny’s whole life was crashing down—that God began re-building from the ashes something brand new. One Sunday I stood with Johnny before the congregation and, with his permission, shared about his journey and his celebration of 10 months of sobriety—there was a standing ovation. A month later on Christmas Eve at the largest service of the year quiet, shy, Johnny stood before a packed church and shared the light that Jesus had shone in his darkness. God doesn’t always give us what we want—but that is truly a good thing.

Thy will be done—is supremely a declaration that God is indeed bringing about his will on earth. The world is busy telling us stories that say that everything is in our hands; all of it is left up to us; we are that masters of our fate and the captain of our souls—such false stories blind us to the workings of God in the world. Yet we gather every week as a community of faith to pray, sing, listen and perceive what is really happening in the world—that God’s will in fact **is** working all things together for good—as Romans 8 says. That God is taking our evil and re-working it toward good.

To pray: “Thy will be done,” is to beg, not for what we want, but rather to beg to have our lives caught up in that amazing project that is infinitely greater and better than our lives—the adventure of God’s Kingdom coming on earth. Prayer in Jesus name is lifelong training in taking God’s will more and more seriously and our own will less and less so.