

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
“Praying Like Jesus: Thy Will Be Done”
Rev. Joanne Blair
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Matthew 6:9-13

In his book, *How Life Imitates the World Series*, Dave Bosewell described how the Orioles’ manager Earl Weaver handled Reggie Jackson in a game. You sports fans may remember this. Weaver had a rule that no one could steal a base unless he was given the signal. Well, Reggie Jackson was a powerful and fast superstar ... a real force to be reckoned with ... and Jackson figured he could decide for himself. In one game, he made his move without getting the signal and did, in fact, steal second base.

Weaver pulled Jackson aside later and told him why he didn’t give him the signal. The next batter in the lineup was Lee May ... the second-best power hitter after Jackson. Now that Jackson had left first base open, the pitcher could, and did, walk May. The third batter in the lineup was pretty weak, so Weaver had to put in a pinch hitter, thus depleting his bench strength, which he needed later in the game.

Reggie Jackson saw his immediate situation, but the manager saw the whole picture.

Sometimes we think we know what is best, but God always knows what is best. More often than not, we just don’t know “the rest of the story.”

We all do it. So often we pray seeking to get God’s attention and tell God what we need or want. And we usually have some “very good suggestions” about how God might accomplish it!

We all do it. When we say the Lord’s Prayer, we frequently rattle off the words from memory and give little thought to what we are saying. We forget that God is the chief concern of this prayer, and not us. God’s name, God’s kingdom, and God’s will are to be our leading concerns whenever we pray.

Last week, I was telling a friend of mine (who is not a church-goer) about the series we are doing on the Lord’s Prayer. Her response was, “I’m not religious, I’m spiritual.” How many times do we hear that when conversations touch on the subject of faith? When I asked her what it meant to be spiritual, she stumbled and said, “it means being a good person in the world.”

Well, it does for me too ... with a little more detail. I believe that spirituality is discovering the connection that exists between God and me. And spiritual formation is building on that connection. Working toward transforming my life to be with Christ, trying to become like Christ, and living for Christ.

And I believe that the Lord’s Prayer is the revelation that teaches me. Christ, himself, laid out this path to spiritual fulfillment. Christ, himself, modeled this for us throughout his ministry. And Christ, himself, invited us to join him.

“...thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”

To follow God's will is often not an easy thing ... and no where do we realize that more than in the Garden of Gethsemane. On the recent trip to Israel, that was the number one place I wanted to see. Touching trees whose roots were there at the time of Jesus, I sought to process Jesus' struggle in the garden. Jesus didn't want to die, and wondered if there might be another way. But then, he submitted himself completely to the Father's will.

"Thy will be done." What does it mean to submit ourselves to God's will? It is a willing surrender. A willing surrender is not the same thing as a passive resignation. A willing surrender is an intentional decision that requires great courage, faith and trust ... allowing us to live more fully with God in the present.

I repeat, in the present ... trusting that God is in control of the big picture.

When we linger in the past, or fixate on goals for the future, we miss out on what God is calling us to do, and who God is calling us to be right now. Of course we have goals. Of course we make plans. And I'm not saying that our plans and God's plans can't be in harmony ... but I am saying that we always need to let God lead. Because this I can promise you: God's will is always good.

To pray, "Your will be done," means to recognize that God is for us, and wants only good for us ... all of us. To pray, "Your will be done" means to understand that we need to overcome the human tendency to center our lives in ourselves. To make us God-centered rather than self-centered. To pray "Your will be done" means to open ourselves up to being instruments of God, helping to usher in the kingdom.

To pray "Your will be done" is not to change God's will, but that God's will might be known and done by us.

To do the will of God on earth as it is in heaven means to embrace the ways of God. To willingly and joyfully embrace God's will ... even when it's hard.

But how do we always know God's will? We don't. But we have some pretty good guidelines to follow. We earnestly pray, study scripture, trust, and learn to listen.

And we ask ourselves:

- Does it honor God?
- Is it a reflection of our loving and just Lord?
- Am I being led by the Holy Spirit?

The ancient pagan Celts, and later, Christians, used the term "thin places" to describe mesmerizing places such as the isle of Iona. Heaven and earth, the Celtic saying goes, are only three feet apart, but in "thin places" that distance is even shorter ... where we are closest to God. Where the gap is closed. "Thin places" are where we catch glimpses of the divine.

The Garden of Gethsemane was, indeed, a thin place for me. And I came to wonder ... why can't *we* be thin places? I believe we can.

God has a plan for creation and for humankind. And Thy will **will** be done. The question is, will we be the ones to do it?