

1st Sunday of Lent 2013 - Rev'd Steve Johnson

In the name of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit

“Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”.

Imagine Baptist Minister walking down the Chestnut Street in Philadelphia, an ordinary guy wearing smart clothes. He sees a man approaching, homeless, living on the street. He could see how dirty he was, his skin caked, his beard, very long down to his waste, full of old stale food. As he gets near, the tramp offers him a cup of McDonalds Coffee. The minister replies, you are getting very generous. The tramp replies – if God gives you something good you ought to share it.

The minister thought that he must want something in return. He offered him a small amount of money to buy more coffee. The tramp said no. When the minister asked again, he said he just wanted a hug.

So the minister was not keen, looking at state of the man, but did just that –and the hug which seemed to last for ages.

And as he hugged him, he became aware of the Bible reference from Matthew, “I was hungry did you feed me, I was naked did you clothe me, I was sick did you care for me, I was the tramp on Chestnut street – did you hug me – doing the will of God is not always doing what you want, but is sometimes stepping out of your comfort zone.

Bringing Gods will here on earth can at times be challenging, but we need to respond.

“Your Kingdom come, your will be done, as it is in heaven”.

The language of the kingdom was forever on Jesus’ lips. In the first petition – we know the true identity of God, but this knowledge leads us to live in a certain way. It was his preferred way of speaking about the new way of living he offered.

Now when Jesus took up the theme of the Kingdom of God, he was picking up the words of the prophet Isaiah.

The great prophet Isaiah in Chapter 2 communicates his vision of a future when all nations will go up to Jerusalem and be taught by God, to learn to walk in God's paths. There will be an era of peace and justice for the whole world, a consequence of the fact that all will accept God as their guide and arbitrator. The Reign of God is the new world order if you like, open to all, an order that follows from knowledge of God and his ways.

But how can this beautiful vision become a reality – what does God want us to do?

Well some Jewish people thought the establishment could only happen by the work of God alone. Some saw political revolution. Some saw at the time of Jesus, it could be achieved only by observing the Ten Commandments, by living according to the Torah, the Law of the Lord – as spoken by the Pharisees .

But Jesus used the image of the Kingdom of God to express the heart of the message.

- 1) The Kingdom of God will not arrive by means of human violence or power – it is nothing to do with the victory of some over others- it is victory for all – as Jesus explained – it is a not Kingdom according to the criteria of this world.
- 2) The Kingdom of God is universal – like a tree which offers shelter to all the birds in the sky – it is a reality open to all – no one is excluded
- 3) That the Kingdom is an object of deep longing, a future reality which the father will bring about in his time, but has already begun – like the mustard seed.

In the petition – Jesus speaks of God's reign already at work in the world – in a hidden, mysterious manner. It requires a radical commitment – those who have eyes to see, and ears to hear the mystery of Jesus become in their turn subjects of the kingdom. It is by

your saying yes to Jesus, you prepare the way for the kingdom and allow it to emerge from hiddenness into the light of day.

To put it in a nutshell

“The Kingdom of God becomes a reality when people live according to the will of God” – and this means “To do what is pleasing to God, to accomplish God’s good pleasure”. It is not simply a question of obeying abstract law, rather it is living out the consequences of a personal relationship. A new way. Think of your own personal relationships - If we love someone, we spontaneously try to do whatever pleases that person – to act in a way that makes them happy. The same is true if we love God.

But this thought can be reversed. If God loves us, then what makes God happy is for us to attain the fullness of life, to find happiness, not in a superficial way through materialism, but by becoming who we are truly meant to be. Nothing more than we would wish for a child.

But there is another meaning to “your will be done” – the will of God.

Let us not forget that God created us for a reason – that our life has meaning: the existence of the universe and of every creature has a purpose willed by the goodness of God. God created us to live in communion with him. Like any parent – if you truly love your child – you have hopes, dreams and expectations of them. You want your child to develop their abilities to the full – to grow. At the same time, loving parents do not force their children into certain ways of acting, they wish their children to use their gifts fully to become more mature and responsible adults.

The same is true of God, to an even greater extent. God desires our happiness, but unlike a parent – it is God who is responsible for our gifts, and one of the greatest of those is freedom. To fulfil God’s plan, therefore we have to become fully ourselves by developing our gifts.

God's plan does not shackle our freedom – it is a call to use our freedom to become human beings who are more and more in God's image, capable of loving and serving. God's will can never be separated from God's love; A baby instinctively closes his hand upon the finger of an adult. When the adult responds and closes a hand in return, the baby's fingers, hand and even the arm are entirely closed. Even so, my hold on God will sometimes seem very weak, and yet the Father's hold on me is strong, and secure and safe. We are safe in the grip of grace. To surrender to God is not to yield with a sense of resignation to the unavoidable and implacable iron of determinism. It is to embrace the obedience that leads to perfect peace.

In the most difficult hour of Jesus's life in Gethsemane, he experiences the full extent and power of evil. Nonetheless- Jesus prays "Abba.....not what I want, but what you want" – because Jesus is rooted in the conviction that God, wants the best for him and for the world, in spite of contradictory appearances.

So how can we, in our turn, do the will of God.

Jesus compares his disciples to light.

Just like them we must shine. Light can scarcely do anything else. To do His will it is not about dreaming up innumerable projects – it is about discovering how we also can be that light.

Doing the will of God, means above all letting God do his will in and through us.

The first words of the prayer place us at the very heart of the Gospel, through Christ and by the gift of his spirit, we enter into a brand new relationship with God.

Our relationship made up of trust and love is not for the few, but for all humanity – the whole of creation. We ask God to reveal his true identity to all, so that the human race

can live according to his loving will and this allow a new world order to come about. Just as an orchestra must retune their instruments before they are ready for a concert performance, every time we pray “Your will be done”, we surrender ourselves to the Lordship of Christ and invite him to retune our lives.

In the last words of this petition, it says – “on earth as in heaven”. Heaven stands for God and in these petitions we pray for the reality of God to penetrate the earth more and more, we ask that God’s love may transform an indifferent or hostile world to peace and justice – just as the Minister did in the story of meeting the down and out in Philadelphia, we do what God wants, not what we want.

As our petition says

“Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”