

Third Sunday after Pentecost

The Lord's Prayer: Our Unity

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**Psalm 119: 97-106**

**Jeremiah 29: 1-14**

**Thy Will Be Done**



If I could describe WoodsWork 2019 in three words, I would say: IT WAS HOT! This past week we took 180 people to Salem County, New Jersey to build three homes on our annual mission trip, WoodsWork. I would encourage any of you to consider being an advisor on this trip because not only would you be loved-on for giving a week of your time, but you would be able to witness the Holy Spirit working in action unlike any other way you've ever seen.

During one of our small group sessions at WoodsWork this past week, a member in my group mentioned a story that made a huge impact on her prayer life. The story goes as such:

“A very religious man was once caught in rising floodwaters. He climbed onto the roof of his house and trusted God to rescue him. A neighbor came by in a canoe and said, “The waters will soon be above your house. Hop in, and we’ll paddle to safety.” “No thanks,” replied the religious man. “I’ve prayed to God, and I’m sure he will save me.” A short time later the police came by in a boat. “The waters will soon be above your house. Hop in, and we’ll take you to safety.” “No thanks,” replied the religious man. “I’ve prayed to God, and I’m sure he will save me.” A little time later a rescue services helicopter hovered overhead, let down a rope ladder and said, “The waters will soon be above your house. Climb the ladder, and we’ll fly you to safety.” “No thanks,” replied the religious man. “I’ve prayed to God, and I’m sure he will save me.” All this time the floodwaters continued to rise until soon they reached above the roof, and the religious man drowned. When he arrived in heaven he demanded an audience with God. Ushered into God’s throne room he said, “Lord, why am I here in heaven? I prayed for you to save me, I trusted you to save me from that flood.” “Yes you did my child,” replied the Lord. “And I sent you a canoe, a boat and a helicopter. But you never got in.”

Our summer series, focusing on The Lord's Prayer, continues with the third petition to God, *Thy will be done.*

The Lord's Prayer is something that my small group talked about as being a prayer we take for granted. We memorized it so long ago (and some competed against each other in the children's Sunday school to learn it first), but we don't think about the individual phrases. It begins by acknowledging God as Father in heaven. Jesus then models a petition, presenting three requests to the Father: 1) that God would cause His name to be hallowed; meaning his name is holy.

2) that God would bring His kingdom to earth; that we would feel God here on earth. 3) and that God's will would be done *on earth as it is in heaven* (Matthew 6:10). So today we dive deeper into the meaning of God's will, what is it, and how it applies to our spiritual lives today.

When we pray, *Thy will be done*, we are asking God to do what He desires. Like Job I like to think about the vastness of God. So think about this, we're praying to the God who said, *Let there be light, and there was light* (Genesis 1:3), so we know that His sovereign decree will be accomplished, whether or not we pray for it.

But there is another aspect of God's will, which we call His "revealed" will. This is God's will that He has revealed to us but that He does not force upon us. For example, it is God's will that we speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). God has called us to love one another as ourselves. We aren't called to turn our backs but rather extend a hand.

So when we pray, *Thy will be done*, we acknowledge God's right to rule. We do not pray, *My will be done*. And this list of things I need and those people I need healed; but we're praying, *Thy will be done*. Asking that God's will be done is a demonstration of our trust that He knows what is best. It is a statement of submission to God's ways and His plans. We ask for our will to be conformed to His.

Another night during WoodsWork, Gavin Ivey shared an insightful message about praying to God during our worship time. He stated when reflecting on Proverbs 21: 2, *All deeds are right in the sight of the doer, but the Lord weighs the heart*, that God is not a genie. We don't pray to God a list of demands and requests, because it's God's will not ours. We are called to have trusting faith in God for the events of our life. I think this message he shared had a profound effect on the youth sitting in the room that evening. Knowing that they don't have to pray to God a list of wishes but rather pray to God in hopes to grow and strengthen their relationship, because God already loves them and knows the requests inside their hearts. Hearing that God will continue to be an active agent in their lives during a time when many of their friends turn their backs on them or treat them as inferior is a powerful concept.

When I think of God's will, I'm reminded of a text from 1 Timothy that I studied in my Greek class. It reads, *[God] wants all [people] to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and [humanity], the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all [people]* (1 Tim 2:3-6). That is the essence of God's will to me. And while there are so many passages in the Bible that reflect "God's will," I choose to preach on the well-known scripture from the prophet Jeremiah in order to illuminate our hearts. Listen now for how God is speaking to the people today from Jeremiah, chapter 29, verses 1 through 14:

*These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. This was after King Jeconiah, and the queen mother, the court officials, the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the artisans, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem. The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom King Zedekiah of Judah sent to Babylon to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It said: Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from*

*Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the Lord.*

*For thus says the Lord: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.*

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Sometimes things are not as we want them to be. Despite our best efforts, our circumstances aren't user friendly. We want peace when we have turmoil, we want joy when we have sadness, we want freedom when we have suffering. In this passage, Jeremiah found himself with the Israelites in the city of Jerusalem which was being conquered by the Babylonians. False prophets were telling the people not to give up; there's still hope. God will surely send a miracle of deliverance as He has in the past. But Jeremiah's message from God was a little different and probably not as popular. He told them that there is no last-minute miracle on the way. God is coming in 70 years! But in the middle of his message we find this remarkable verse of comfort and hope speaking from God's voice, *For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope* (v. 11). Many people use this passage as a single statement on letters to graduating seniors or people in transition stages of life. But God did not intend for His word to be taken out of context. Let me unpack this message from Jeremiah to more fully understand what God intended for us to hear.

We begin this passage by understanding that the Israelites must make the best of their situation. That is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to those carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. Build houses and settle down (well I just spent a week with 180 people and we built the frames of 3 houses in 10 days, so I would assume that'll take all the Israelites a long time to build homes for themselves). Plant gardens and eat what they produce (I don't know about those of you who are gardeners, but planting a garden and waiting for the produce is a year-long process sometimes, so now were adding months onto the schedule). Marry and have sons and daughters (I pray that they don't just find the person standing beside them but take time to think of who they want to marry, and we all know that having a child is not overnight). Encourage your children to marry, so they too may have sons and daughters (well now we're looking at generations of time before God will come again and bring them out of exile). Increase in number there; do not decrease. He doesn't say, it'll be over soon so ignore your hardships and wait for peace to come. Jeremiah's point is that there is not going to be a last-minute miracle or

any sudden solutions to the problem. All you can do for now is make the most of it, do the best you can, rejoice in the Lord, and keep on going. This brings us back to God's will, not ours. God asks us during times of suffering to endure and hold onto hope, strengthen ourselves in the pain and grasp life.

Next Jeremiah encourages through the voice of God to pray for where they are, not where they want to be or where they are going but the moment and place in which they reside. He tells them to seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which God has carried them into exile, to ask God to bless their surroundings. Jeremiah was telling the people to pray for the "shalom" of the nation where they had been exiled.

Remember that these words were spoken to a displaced, defeated, depressed group of exiles. I'm reminded of the lyrics of a powerful song we sang this past week during worship with the youth.

The lyrics read:

"So teach my song to rise to you, when temptation comes my way, when I cannot stand. I'll fall on you. Jesus, you're my hope and stay. Lord I need you, Oh, I need you, every hour I need you, my one defense my righteousness, Oh God how I need you."

With the Lord in our lives, things are never hopeless. I heard those words in my prayers this past week, continuing to tell myself it's God's will not mine I need to listen to. And today, we hear those most popular words, *For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.* The Lord teaches us to pray, to go to him when we are in doubt or fear. If we take this verse out of context as though it will solve our destiny, then we lose the impact Jeremiah tried to make on the people of Israel. They must hold onto the hope of the Lord in order to overcome their afflictions. This isn't a blanket statement that God has a plan for your future, and that you don't need to worry about your screw ups or the next steps in your life. This is a verse of solace to people who know no peace.

I think for our spiritual lives today, trusting in God's will is ever more important. The answer is not just to have faith in God but to have trusting-faith. It's scary trusting God but "trusting-faith" is not about when, or what could or should have been, it is about living in the moment - breath by breath - depending completely on Jesus to take care of everything.

Trusting-faith is not tossing your hands up in the air because, "Whelp God's will is done, there's nothing I can do about it." It's about opening your heart to the promises of God in prayer. We pray each Sunday that *Thy will be done* because we are holding onto the promise that we will come to salvation we will be with Christ again. Praying *Thy will be done* is bigger than our destiny or our everyday problems. It's about knowing how to have trusting faith in God.

In an age of anxiety and worry, I remember the words of a person I was discipled by as a teenager. He said, "You can't breathe enough air today for tomorrow, and you have used up all that was needed yesterday - so you must learn to live your life day by day - breath by breath in trusting faith of Jesus." For in the words of Christ Jesus himself, the holy son of God...  
*Thy will be done.*