

Your Will Be Done

Series: Teach us to Pray

Date: 10 May 2020, 4th Sunday after Easter

Location: St George's Online

Texts: Matthew 26:36-46; Galatians 5:13-26

What does it look like to live a full human life? We often think about life in terms of freedom and authenticity. Coronavirus has seriously impacted our freedoms. We can go where we want. We can't do all the things we want. But we've embraced those restrictions for our collective and individual good.

On Wednesday Prof. Neil Ferguson stepped down from the UK's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies. He is one of the world's leading disease modellers. Back in March, the UK government implemented strict social distancing measures, on his advice. He stepped down this week because it came out that he had been breaking those very social distancing guidelines in order to conduct an affair.¹

We take freedom as freedom to do whatever we want to do. We want to do what feels good. We want to avoid pain and suffering. We want to be in control. We want to be praised. But sometimes what we want isn't good. We have an innate selfishness that bends us away from wanting the good. All too often it seems we use our freedom in ways that damage ourselves and others. Maybe being free isn't all that it's cracked up to be because we do such a bad job of it.

That question, what does a full human life, a good life, dare I say a moral life, look like is one we all ask, whether you're a Christian or not. We all want to be seen as good people, and we want to know how to be good.

In this series, *Teach us to Pray: Learning from Jesus in Lockdown*, we're looking at the prayer Jesus taught his disciples. In the prayer Jesus teaches us first who it is that we pray to and then what to pray for. We pray to our heavenly Father who loves us and delights to give his children good gifts. That being the case, Jesus tells us to ask God for 6 things. The first 3 requests focus on God - his Name, His Kingdom, His Will. We start with him and his agenda, and only then move to ourselves. Today we're looking at the prayer, *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. I want to suggest that this prayer shows us how to be truly human. The prayer has a global sense - that the Father's will be done on earth. Heaven of course is the place where God's will is done perfectly. The earth: not so much. But we also get a sense that this starts with the personal - that the Father's will be done in my life.

So what does it look like to do the will of the Father? The place we discover this is through reading the Bible. St Paul writes to Timothy

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-52553229>

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man [and woman] of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Jesus sums up our calling as human beings as to love God and to love our neighbour. That is a condensed version of the 10 commandments. I do find it interesting that people seem to remember the command to love, but forget the others like not coveting, or not committing adultery, let alone having no other gods.

Talk of commands can make us think that Christianity is really all about being a good person and keeping rules. Sometimes we want those rules. Other times we reject them. I remember as a teenager other kids saying that being a Christian was being a killjoy. It was all about saying no to all the fun things in life. And I have to say that we can be too serious as Christians. Which is a shame because we, of all people, have reason to be joyful. Talking with other parents I know that many often send their kids to church schools because they want them to learn "Christian values". That vague notion always seems to be put to one side when the Bible disagrees with my own moral compass.

I think all of us fear that if we take God too seriously we might miss out on some of the fun in life. We fear that God might be holding out on us; That his commands are there to spoil our fun; That because he says no, he might not love us. It's the same lie the snake used on our first parents in the garden. But God is not a cosmic killjoy, wagging a disapproving finger at us. He's our heavenly Father who wants the best for us. He's our jealous lover who doesn't want us ruining our lives by chasing other men, but rather longs for us to respond to his affection.

The place where we see God's love for us most clearly is the cross. And it's in the garden of Gethsemane, as he contemplates his death that Jesus himself prays this prayer - *Your will be done*. Just before teaching the Lord's prayer Jesus had said that loving your neighbour means loving your enemy. Now, here in the garden, we see just what Jesus' love for his Father and love for his enemies means.

Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." (Matthew 26:38-39)

Here we stand on holy ground. The cup Jesus speaks of is the cup of God's wrath against a people that defy him and deface those who bear his image and despoil the creation he has made. It is the cup that he will drink for you so that you don't have to, that you might receive forgiveness and life from the Father. In the garden, as the cup is held before him, everything in Jesus' humanity, the humanity he shares with us, cries out for self preservation, control and comfort. The wrestle in his heart is so great Luke says he sweat drops of blood. And yet Jesus prays, *yet not as I will, but as you will*. He prays it out of love for his Father and love for his enemies, even you and me.

Here we see Jesus at his most human, living out what it is to be human, doing the will of his Father in heaven. What does it look like to live a full human life? It's this. Walking the way of the cross, in the footsteps of Christ. Saying no to self and yes to him.

We pray, *Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*, even in my life - because we need God's help for this. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. The Father gives the Holy Spirit to all who trust in Christ. The Spirit is God's power and presence with us. The Spirit makes us alive to God. He gives us power to be fully human, to say, with Jesus, "not my will, but yours be done" in all the trials and temptations of life. That's what our reading from Galatians is all about.

Will you pray this prayer today? Maybe there's one area of your life you've been holding out on God saying "not your will but mine be done". It's time to give it to him. You can trust him. He's not holding out on you. He loves you. He's given you his Son. Maybe you've said the prayer but your whole life has said to God, "not your will but mine be done". It was for you Jesus drank the cup. It was for you he prayed, "Not my will but yours be done." Today, will you trust him with your life? He's not holding out on you. He loves you. Today, will you say "your will be done" to the King who died for you?