



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

June 18, 2017

"Your Will Be Done" - How to Pray Sermon Series

The Rev. Dr. Tim Shaw

My Way" sung by Frank Sinatra is played. Sometimes when a preacher like me, uses an illustration like I just did, even a super-dated illustration, and then you look at the title of the talk the preacher is about to deliver, it's pretty obvious where he's headed.

I just played "My Way," and you're about to hear a sermon entitled "Your Will Be Done". "My Way" or "Your Way." That's about as obvious as you get. If you're under 30 years old, maybe under 40, you might have never heard that song before. That's a guy by the name of Frank Sinatra, who was the Bruno Mars of the 1940s, singing one of his iconic anthems.

I think there are some people in certain generations that love that song. It seems to speak of a dogged determination to do what you think is right no matter what. Unfortunately, if there could be the anthem that could be sung over some sections of my life, it would be this song or one like it. In some parts of my life, I've done it my way and that has not always been the best way.

In the passage we're going to look at today, right in the middle of the most famous prayer in the Bible, Jesus is going to teach us to sing a different anthem over our lives. Not "my way" but "His way." Over the past couple of months we've been talking on Sunday mornings about

learning how to pray. What we're going to explore today is how a deepening relationship with God in prayer has this amazing ability to uproot our tendency to be stubborn and insist that our own will be done.

You see, the best, the smartest thing we can do, I think, is surrender to God's way. Right in the middle of the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples, He prays to His Father, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Prayer is one of the places where God changes us, changes our hearts, so that we might say, "Yes" to His will for us and for our world.

Today we have a familiar passage from the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew chapter 6, verses 7-13.

7 "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. **8** Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

9 "Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. **10** Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread. **12** And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.

Before I get into today's text and the main topic of saying yes to God's will for our lives, I'd like to explore a couple of basic questions some of us might have today about prayer.

I've been learning how to pray for a long time and there is still so much for me to learn. I find it incredibly easy to be in a conversation with God all day long, but I have found it more challenging sometimes to sit and be still, to quiet my heart and mind and talk with God. I think you can have a good conversation with God while on your feet. But I've been realizing that there's more that God wants me to discover about prayer.

I have a lot of questions about prayer. I have a lot of questions about a lot of things. I am endlessly curious. When I'm praying I sometimes have a lot of questions for God. Maybe you do too. Maybe you have some pretty fundamental questions about prayer. Maybe those questions go all the way to the heart of whether or not God actually exists and if He does exist, does He care about you and can he really do anything to help you with the real challenges in your life?

I love the fact that the Bible is filled with people who ask questions. I love that. They're just like us. Throughout the scriptures we see people who are confused and angry. We see women and men who are crushed by grief and disappointment, who stand before God and ask their questions. The fact that the Bible is filled with people like that is super encouraging and incredibly freeing for me. People have doubts in the Bible and they talk about them. People have questions in the Bible and they ask them.

If you are a person this morning who has a lot of questions and doubts about God and prayer, I want to encourage you to lean into your questions and doubts. One of the dangers of sitting on those questions and doubts instead of exploring them, is that you can become a dogmatic doubter. To be dogmatic is to treat your opinions as if they were, without a doubt, settled facts.

I want to encourage you today that if you're on your way to becoming a dogmatic doubter, or you're already there, that you not only explore the doubts you might have about Christianity, about God and about praying to God. I want to encourage you to be open to doubting your doubts. Make sure that along the way you not only explore your doubts about what we're saying from this pulpit from week to week, but that you consider doubting what you doubt.

Dallas Willard, who was a professor of philosophy at a big private university in Southern California that I won't name, once said, "Knowledge grows by not only doubting your beliefs and believing your doubts, but by doubting your doubts and believing your beliefs." That's very interesting.

And this will seem super crazy to some of you this morning. One of the ways I want to encourage all of us to explore our doubts by learning how to pray. That may seem like a stupid idea to some of you. Why would I start praying when I'm not even sure God exists, or cares, or can do anything to help me? Don't I need to clear up my questions and doubts before I start praying? I get that. But I still want to encourage you to explore your doubts by learning more about how to pray and by actually praying.

I believe that when we pray, we're actually speaking with a God who really exists and that God is perfectly capable of revealing Himself to us. I believe that when we pray, there is a God who is listening, who already knows what we need and is eager to have an intimate relationship with you and me. I believe that when we open our hearts and minds to this God, He is able to do amazing things in our lives.

He is a God who can heal broken relationships. He is a God who can give us hope when we're lost in despair. He's a God who can bring clarity when we're confused. He can bring peace when we're churning inside. He is a God who wants to grow us into people who will more and more say to him, "Not my will be done, but Your will be done in my life." Test your doubts, explore your skepticism by learning to pray and by simply praying.

So let's look at this prayer that Jesus taught His disciples to pray. We're going to focus only on the second request in the prayer, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done." Right at the heart of the Lord's Prayer is that refrain. "Your will be done in my life, Jesus, not my will. Your kingdom come into

the world with all its counter-cultural values and priorities. The in-breaking of the Kingdom of God into the world, into my work, into my relationships, into our communities, into my own heart," is at the center of what Jesus taught His disciples to pray.

Because we pray the Lord's Prayer so frequently in church we are in danger of no longer really thinking about what we're saying when we pray, "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is done in heaven." When we pray that, we are actually making a request that is momentous. It's a request for God to change me and the world I inhabit. And it is a request to change all of that dramatically.

Annie Dillard reminds us of how flippantly we often treat this prayer, and prayer in general. She writes in her book, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, "Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke (when we pray)? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT... (when we come to church) we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews."

When you and I pray, "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done," and if we mean it, and if we are truly open to that happening in our lives, we're uttering some life changing words.

Hold onto your hats, fasten your seat belts, gird up your loins if you pray, "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done" and really mean it. You are about to embark on a pretty amazing and life-changing journey.

When we pray like this we are essentially saying to God, “Not my will but Your will be done in my life, in my relationships, in my work, in our world. Not what I want, but what You want, God, is what I truly want to see happen.” We’re saying, “Father, I surrender to what You want for me.”

We have basically two paths we can follow in life. There are two roads we can go down in our relationship with God. One is a path of surrender and the other more familiar road, at least for me, is the path of stubbornness. Surrendering is seen in our culture as weakness while stubbornness is lifted up as a virtue. Dogged determination can be a wonderful characteristic for one to have in some situations. But if what I’m holding onto is not God’s good will for my life then I’m making a pretty big mistake.

How often do we find ourselves essentially saying, “God, not in this area of my life. I can’t let You guide me here. This is too important for me to give control to anyone else, even You. I know what’s best.” But it’s in prayer that our stubbornness is identified and can be relinquished. It is in prayer that I can again recognize that our God is a loving Father who knows what is best for me, His child.

I have a lot to learn about surrendering. To be honest I like things my way. I like to think that most of the time I’m right, that I know what’s best. But here’s what I’m discovering. I grow spiritually when I start to surrender more and more of myself to God. As I’ve learned to say, “Yes” to God’s will for my life, it is then that I’ve really begun to be transformed and it is then that I’ve really begun to experience the abundant life that God has for me.

How would our lives change for the better if when we prayed, we were truly seeking God’s will for our lives? How would our lives be different if we prayed: “Lord, what would you have me do today? Father, what do You want me to do with my life? Lord, may Your will be done with my career.

“How do You want me to use the gifts and the abilities and the experience that you have so graciously given to me? Lord, what is Your will regarding my relationships? Lord, how do You want me to treat the person at work who has been the constant thorn in my side? How do You want me to react to him or her? What do You want me to do with my money? My time?”

How would our lives change for the better if we prayed, “Lord, Your will be done in me.”

Prayer helps us reframe the questions we ask ourselves and God. And what we so often end up discovering are some amazing things about God’s will. We discover that God’s will is actually really good. God has good things for us. We also begin to understand that in many ways God’s will is not difficult to understand. In so many areas of our lives, God’s will for us is crystal clear.

Sometimes we think that doing God’s will, will be bad, messed up and distasteful instead of good, pleasing and perfect. We think that doing what God wants will suck all the fun and joy out of life. Just the opposite is true. God has good things for us. God’s will is good and pleasing and perfect.

There’s also another common misconception about the will of God. We often think that the will of God is hard to figure out. We act like God is playing a guessing

game with us. That’s not true. God’s will is good and God’s will is also frequently pretty clear. God’s will is good, but it often isn’t what we would plan for ourselves.

We tend to want what is easy. We often want what makes our lives more comfortable. God may in fact give us those things, but He also wants us to grow, to be transformed, to experience life at its depths.

And that usually means change, which we just instinctively resist. And that usually means applying kingdom principles in our lives and kingdom principles are usually counter-intuitive. They are frequently very different from the values of our society. Jesus linked God’s kingdom to God’s will being done in the world. If we want to know about the will of God, look at what Jesus said about the Kingdom of God.

We sometimes think that the will of God is mysterious, that it’s hard to figure out. Not really, Jesus is pretty clear. When we look at how Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God we will know immediately that doing God’s will often doesn’t make sense in our world. The will of God usually goes against conventional thinking. The will of God kind of turns everything upside down, or as Dallas Willard says, “Jesus turns the upside down world, right side up.”

Jesus said things like, “The first will be last and the last will be first. The humble will be exalted and the exalted will be humbled.”

In that kingdom we live by grace rather than works. The Kingdom of God is grounded in love instead of legalism. There are lots of paradoxes when we talk about God’s will.

Do you want to find life? Then give your life away. Deny yourself, put others first, and you will experience life at its deepest level.

Can we trust God that His will is best for our lives? Can we trust Him when He says to love our enemies, to bless those who persecute us? What kind of sense does that make? Can we believe Him when He says, "Forgive not once, not twice, not seven times, but seventy times seven? In other words, always forgive." Can we trust Him when He says, "Deny yourself, and serve others—this is where you will find life." God's will is pretty clear.

Mark Twain once said, "It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand."

One of the purposes of prayer is that God's will becomes our will. It is in prayer that we surrender our will to His will. Prayer helps us unite our will with the will of God. It is not an attempt to get God to do what we want. Prayer is one of the places in our lives where we begin to love what God loves. It's in prayer that we discover that what pleases God will ultimately bring us joy as well.

And one of the most remarkable things we experience as we cultivate a life of prayer is that as we draw close to God, He changes us. Slowly, over time, we discover that we begin to want what God wants. We become the kind of people who look more like Jesus.

In May, I had an incredible opportunity to attend the Alpha Leadership Conference in London. The worship in Royal Albert Hall was powerful. The teaching was so

helpful. I had an incredible time with other leaders from our church who were able to go. I was challenged. I was encouraged. The Spirit of God drew me closer to Himself through it all.

But the most important moment for me happened on the last Saturday morning we were in England. And it didn't happen in Royal Albert Hall. It happened at the church led by Mike Pilavachi and Andy Croft. It happened at a worship conference at Soul Survivor church in Watford, England. This beautiful moment did not take place while I was singing or listening to a great lecture. It happened in a Question and Answer session after Tom Smith taught on leading worship.

Tom was the worship leader at HIM and he led worship here on Sunday morning after this year's HIM conference. After Tom spoke about leading worship, Tom, Mike and Beth Croft took questions from those who had come to the conference. A twelve-year-old boy stood up and courageously asked a question about how he might become a drummer in a worship band.

As I watched how they took the time to take his request seriously, I saw three followers of Jesus, whose lives are being changed to want what God wants be agents of God's kingdom in the life of this twelve-year-old boy. Who knows how great an impact this one moment will have in this boy's life?

Here are three Christ-followers who have learned to want God's will to be done in the world.

(Video clip from Soul Survivor is shown).

That was three people who regularly stand on stages before thousands of people and who have been, and are being, reshaped by the heart of God. That's what it looks like to say, "Yes," to doing God's will.

At the end of my life, I am not interested in pointing out how I did things my way. I want to say, in humility, that I learned to do things **God's** way. In the end I want to be able to affirm that I ended up wanting God's will to be done more than I wanted my own will done.

In fact, my greatest desire is that my will would be in sync with God's will. And it is in prayer that I'm learning how to recognize His good and perfect will. And it is in prayer that I am learning to say, with all my heart, "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, right here on earth, right here in me."

+ + + + + + + + + +

Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at fpchawaii.org The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by visiting: fpchkoolau@gmail.com