

2nd Pentecost Sunday Matt 9 35 to 38 **“Lord Have Mercy”** June 14 2020

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts, be pleasing unto You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen!

Lord have Mercy! Hear, again, the first few verses of our Gospel lesson for today:

³⁵ And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

And the Lord does have mercy! In this Gospel reading, He heals through His mighty power. In His mercy, He also feels for our condition. He has compassion for us. His gut is wrenched by our helplessness and our affliction. That is far too weak of a word for what the NT uses here, but English does not really have a good way to say this. “Splangchnizo” is not only difficult to say for the English tongue but it is difficult to understand. Literally the word means that his inward parts were moved. I suppose gut wrenching would be an English equivalent, but even that is not enough. The emotional freight of this word is such that Jesus was made physically sick by what he saw, not revolted, but the pain and suffering of the people almost overwhelmed him. He looks at 21st century America the same way.

Do we really believe that? Or do we think that we are much better off with our cell phones, modern pharmaceuticals, life-saving surgeries, and retirement accounts? Do we egotistically and pridefully envision ourselves in this picture more as walking in the shoes of Jesus than walking in the shoes of the crowds he was facing in our Gospel?

The world has been so messed up by sin that the things we think are normal are all unfit for heaven. The nature which we think is so “natural” and pure is but a cesspool compared to the world which God made and gave us in Eden.

The love which the best of couples and the happiest of families share is but a pale shadow, a distant echo of the rich and beautiful love which God put into the hearts of Adam and Eve and which we will experience in heaven. The amazing feats of athletes at the Olympic Games will look like a kindergarten field day compared to what we can do when these bodies are unleashed from their sinful bounds on the last day. And when it comes to our minds, earthly Einstein will look like a dummy in heaven.

So, if this is true, what is God's will for us, and why has it not been done? The divine will is one of those hidden parts of our God which is revealed in tantalizing glimpses in Scripture, but which remains maddeningly obscure. We want to know His will, but can we perceive it and are we able to bear it?

Most of the time our thoughts turn to the will of God when some great disaster strikes. Then it is so easy to slip into the strange comfort that fatalism affords us. We say things like, "I don't know why your friend died in a car crash, must be God's will." I am not sure how that helps such a situation, but I hear it enough. But these are not the best times for us to seek the will of God, or at least they really ought **not** be the **only** times we think about the will of God. When some tragedy strikes, we find ourselves asking those difficult "why?" sorts of questions. Perhaps, after much prayer and time, we might get an idea of His will in hindsight, but in the middle of such events, we just cannot see it, blinded as we are.

But God's will is not entirely obscure, in fact he has said some rather plain things about it. In Isaiah (45:22), John (5:34) and 1 Timothy (2:4) and many other places, He says He wants all people to come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. This seems clear to me. God further reveals his salvific will, at least in part to us. Jesus did not come to condemn the world but to save the world (John 3:16-17). Out of God's love, God is clear about what He wants. He wants your blessing, your good, your health, your happiness. He wants you to live forever.

Now because the revealed will of God is an expression of his mercy, grace, and his love, and **not** his sovereign power, there is another thing to know. Love, by its very definition can be disappointed. God does not always get what He wants...by His **choice**.

That may seem odd to say about a being who is The Almighty, but there are some things that power cannot do. Power cannot woo someone to love me. I cannot bully someone into being my real friend. I cannot intimidate affection. You see, God is not after our obedience as much as He is after our hearts¹. He wants to save us; He wants us to be in a relationship in which He is loved and loves us. Power will not get that, but love will.

This means that in this world God often works with a “plan B” or “C” or “D” or even a plan “Z” and beyond. Take, for instance the story recorded in I Samuel 8 in which the people chose a king for themselves. God clearly does not want this. He says so in so many words, but he acquiesces to the request of the people, and when the first king does not work out, he raises up for them David. Plan B can be a pretty good arrangement too! God’s first will was that we did not fall into sin, but spend an eternity growing in our love of God. Sin ruined that plan of God, but God’s gracious will is not so easily thwarted and his love is resourceful beyond all measure. Yes, He would have apparently preferred to keep raising up judges for the people, but when they reject that, He moves onto another way, even though He knows the problems that kings will bring, He still blesses David and gives us the many psalms that he wrote.

We call this “plan B” sort of will, God’s secondary will. The secondary will of God means that we need to be a little circumspect when we would speak of the will of God in any earthly affair. Yes, it may be God’s will, but it is not God’s primary will. That primary will of God is accomplished only in the **salvation** of people, the marvelous relationship God establishes with them which we call faith. Lord have mercy! And He does...mercy **and** grace!

There is another point to be made here about the will of God. Often, I found people fixated on determining “God’s will” for their life. Usually this was when they faced some critical decision in their life, like moving, or taking a job, or deciding on a career. Lots of pious evangelical sorts talk this way. But is this what God means in Jeremiah when he says, “I know the plans I have for you.”? I think God is saying that He wants to do good things for us, to save us, but I don’t think that he has plotted out who we should marry or what job we will take or which house to buy.

He knows these things ahead of time, but that is different than planning it, or making it happen.

I usually tell such people that God has not revealed every detail of his will, but He has told us that He really wants to bless us. I believe He can bless me in this place or in that place. He can bless me if I am married to this person or if I choose to remain single, etc. It is not that one way is the only way that God has in mind. I think He values our free will much more than we do sometimes.

Jesus looks at the way we are right now and he weeps for us, because He was there at the beginning and he knows what we were supposed to be. He knows our potential, a potential we cannot realize no matter how hard we try.

Until we realize just how messed up we are, we cannot really appreciate what He has done for us. Even then, we probably don't appreciate it very well. We just are closer to it. The truth is, there is a great gulf between what I am supposed to be and what I am. That gulf is much greater than the gulf that exists between me in my comfort and the starving delta citizens of Burma or the weeping parents who pull the crushed body of their only child out of the wreckage of natural disaster. I am much more like them than I am like the person God made humanity to be.

When I am aware of that fact, when I realize that Jesus has come to restore that which was lost in the fall of mankind into sin, then I am ready to see the rest of this world in a totally different light. Now, my brother sleeping under a bridge or addicted to meth is just another manifestation of me. Jesus loves him the same way He loves me. The man whose deeds I find so offensive or so painful is not really all that different from me either. The woman whose life is in shambles because of the choices she made will be just as dead as me in a few years. What is the real difference between us? The grave swallows us both.

But Jesus has had mercy on us. His great compassion has moved Him to act, and not only for me, but for all the other miserable wretches in the world too. His greatest desire is to save us, all of us. He has not turned his face away us and our suffering. Rather he has faced our suffering, taken our suffering into himself and in a great mystery, He has born it and offers us His joy.

In fact, in His great mercy and grace, He comes to us today, more certainly and more completely than He did in that day. He pours out His Holy Spirit, the Comforter, our Advocate, upon the whole world through His Word and Sacraments. In His created water and through His creatures' voices, the water and spirit of Holy Baptism bring us into Him, His death and His resurrection. He renews us daily, and creates a clean heart and a right spirit in us, not only in the remembering and daily living-out of our Baptisms, but in the unending promise of new life in His absolution in response to our confessions. He richly nourishes us in the gift of His body and His blood given and shed for us and received in, with and under the bread and wine of Holy communion. And He listens and responds to our every need through the blessing of prayer.

Dear brothers and sisters, rest in the sure knowledge that everyone whose forehead and heart bears the seal of He who died, the cross with which all of us have been marked, is in Him and He in them. And remember the primary will of He who created everything is for us to be saved.

May the grace, mercy and love of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit abide in you to life everlasting. Amen!

1 Hosea 6:6, Psalm 51:16-17. Mark, Mark 12:33, etc.