

Ezekiel 17:22-24
Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15
2 Corinthians 5:6-10; 14-17
Mark 4:26-34

June 16, 2024

SERMON:
THY WILL BE DONE
By Rev. Dr. Don Algeo

Summary: Not my will, but thine.

Until very recently in historical terms, virtually every organized political society has been ruled by a single individual. In English-speaking countries, this person was commonly referred to as a king, or, very occasionally, a queen, but other languages have had other names. In reading history, we learn of Tsars and Shoguns and Maharajahs and fuehrers and Kaisers and rajahs and caliphs and sheiks and pharaohs and caesars and similar titles in every language. Back to English, we also read of emperors, dictators, tribal chieftains, military warlords, totalitarians, despots and tyrants – but the point is always the same: human societies almost invariably form themselves into something like a pyramid, with a supreme authority – a single individual, at the top. And that individual at the top resided there because that individual either inherited or in some other way acquired coercive military and police authority over all those below him or her in the pyramid.

The fact that this model of governance was well-nigh universal throughout recorded human history almost certainly explains why the ancient Jewish writers adopted the language of kingship in speaking of the relationship of their God – Yahweh – to the Jewish nation. To take only a few examples:

[Psalm 10:16](#) says: *"The LORD is king forever and ever; the nations perish from his land.*

In Psalm 93, we read¹: *"The LORD reigns; he is d_robed in majesty;*

...

² *Your throne is established from of old;
you are from everlasting.*

And Psalm 95 tells us:

³ *For the LORD is ⁱa great God,
and a great King ⁱabove all gods.*

Addressing his teaching to the Jewish audience of his time, Jesus of course used language and concepts and imagery with which they were familiar; if he hadn't done so, no one would have paid him any attention.

But the problem with using this kind of human imagery of kingship about God is that the human notion of kings – or tsars or caesars or sheiks or shoguns – carries with it an awful lot of other baggage. When we think of these kinds of rulers, we also think of thrones and palaces; we think of the king's armies spreading the kingdom by conquering its neighbors; we think of royal justice exacting revenge on any subordinates who disobey the king's commands.

Jesus accepted the language of his time; his model prayer even uses the language: *Thy kingdom come...* Indeed, he even allowed himself the title of king – although he was at pains to insist that “*My kingdom is not of this world.*” But the fact that he had to use the language that was familiar to his audience didn't mean that it was adequate to what Jesus was trying to convey about the true nature of the relationship between God and His creation.

The Kingdom of heaven, as Christ teaches us about it, is not just like an earthly kingdom, only transferred somewhere above the clouds.

Christ came to **show** us who God is, to **show** us what kingship in heaven really is.

Does he show us God sitting on a throne? No, he shows us God sitting on a donkey, on the most humble of pack animals.

Does he show us God sending out his armies of angels to conquer all potential human and spiritual enemies? No, he shows us God on His knees, washing the feet of His followers.

Does he show us God ruling with an iron fist over a vanquished world rewarding his loyal underlings and executing his enemies? No, he shows us God dying on a

cross for love of the entire world, good and bad, just and unjust, innocent and guilty alike.

In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus uses two parables to help us understand the true nature of God and God's relationship to the world. Let's read them now, and then think about what they mean for us.

Mark 4: 26-34

Both of these illustrations are offered as comparisons. But what is being compared to what?

The first step in understanding, I think, is to be clear first about what Jesus meant by 'the kingdom of God.' And he himself provides that understanding, in his model prayer: *Thy kingdom come,*" he says, and then unwraps what he means by that image: "*Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*"

But we must be careful here. An earthly kingdom where all the subjects obey the king out of fear of disobedience or out of the desire for reward might be described as one in which the king's will is always done, in which the will of the king finds no dissenters, and is therefore always realized. But this is surely not the ideal that Jesus is holding up to us a model. The very first words of the Lord's Prayer establish the true nature of the dominion where God's will is shared by all: *Our Father who art in heaven,* Jesus says, *thy will be done.*

The image to which Jesus wants us to hold fast is not that of a king and His obedient subjects, but of a family. The kingdom of God is where the will of all inhabitants is harmonious with the will of God because they are all of the same nature.

So to return to our parables. A farmer sows a seed, and if it's the right sort of seed for the soil, the laws of nature will protect and nurture the seed, and allow it to flourish and to grow naturally into a full harvest that fulfills the promise inherent in the seed. In the imagery of the parable, the farmer can rest easy, because he has sown wisely and well, and can therefore entrust the result to nature's providence. It is not growing obediently but naturally; the farmer can now rest, and let nature take its natural course.

And just so with us. When the seeds we sow are the right seeds for heaven's soil, we can rest easy, knowing that we have done our job, and that from now on, the nurturing soil of God's providence will grow and mature the seed into a heavenly harvest. We need not fret or concern ourselves about what the world may say or

do; we can rest easy, knowing that our will is in harmony with God's and that therefore God's power and providence will ensure its full and abundant growth.

And the companion parable expands on the same thought. Even the smallest of seeds, when sown in the nurturing soil, can grow into a mighty tree, one in which all the other inhabitants of God's domains can find comfort and protection.

The prophet Ezekiel, writing long before Christ but using similar imagery, provides the same assurance in the passage we read this morning, the assurance that God's own power and providence will bring to heavenly maturity everything sown according to God's own will:

17:22 Thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar; I will set it out. I will break off a tender one from the topmost of its young twigs; I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain.

17:23 On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it, in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar. Under it every kind of bird will live; in the shade of its branches will nest winged creatures of every kind... I the LORD have spoken; I will accomplish it.

And using his own distinct imagery, Paul makes the same point in our selection for this morning:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

We are not destined to be obedient subjects of a heavenly monarch. We are destined to be joint heirs of all that heaven has to offer, including its responsibilities. Throughout all eternity to come, our wills will be conforming to an ever greater degree with the perfect will of our Father in heaven; but that is a process which we can begin even on this side of the heavenly veil.

As new creations, as newborn children of God through our rebirth in Christ, we can also seek to align our own wills with the will of our Father, and can in the here-and-now experience the peace of knowing that our thoughts, our actions and our lives, however insignificant they may seem from the world's point of view, will from now on grow and evolve and flourish and yield fruits according to heaven's nature.

As newborn children of heaven, each time you refuse to take revenge, on however small and insignificant a scale, each time you bite your tongue instead of spreading

a word of malicious gossip, each time you deflect praise from yourself, much as you'd love to experience it, each time you trust in the words of Jesus rather than those of your own common sense or sense of fairness, each time you honor someone else's opinion and value someone else's time as much as you honor and value your own...each time you do any of those things or the countless others that every day offers as opportunities to follow Christ, you are sowing the seeds into your own life and your own world that God's own spirit, in God's own mysterious ways, and by God's own heavenly power, will help ensure that God's own will will be accomplished, on earth as it is in heaven.

And so our prayer for this morning, Father God, is that you lovingly nourish and guide our wills, so that we may continue the process of becoming more like you in spirit, that we may come to see things the way you see them, value things the way you value them, love one another the way you love each of us; that we may come to follow our Lord Jesus, not in slavish obedience, but because we share the same destination. In his name we pray.