

Not My Will, But Yours

"Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen."

The above is from this Sunday's opening Collect. It focuses our hearts and minds on God's hope that we might love what God commands and shape our lives to what God desires for the human family. God's hope is for us to know joy and fullness of life.

Scripture is clear that God has hopes and dreams for all of us. And often as we think on such things we can get confused between our own choices (free will) and God's ability to move and shape our lives.

The truth is that God's will for us never, ever trumps the gift of free will that God has given us. This is very, very important for the human family to grasp and trust. Free will is just that, our ability to say NO to God anytime, anywhere, any place or circumstance---it is not provisional.

The fact is clear that our free will is never overridden by God. Free will is a terrifying gift that can save or destroy--but it is ours to have and to hold! For example: Jesus in the garden when he says, "not my will, but your will be done." He does not mean that he thinks God wills him to die. Remember God gave us Jesus to point us to joy and wholeness, mercy and justice.

When it became clear, through his increasing conflict with the Roman government and religious authorities, that it would cost him his physical life--he could have said no at any time---right there in the garden he could have gotten up, walked out of the garden, went back to Nazareth and raised a family. But God's hope for justice, mercy, and compassion became his own and he chose to surrender his will to God's hope for humankind---even if it cost him his life.

And there are thousands of untold stories where people chose to create and work for hope for a better world, community, church or family even though it was a tough road to travel. And probably more than a few stories of misery where people chose not to align themselves with God's hope because the risk was too great or the work too hard or they were unwilling to undergo transformation. It is also possible that they live and die with a wealth of regret---but even then God's heartache would be for their misery and sorrow---not because they said no!

Can we really know if we are aligning ourselves with God's hope, God's will? Well, yes, there are some markers to test our actions or desires. Paul refers to some of them as fruits of the spirit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..."(Galatians 5:22).

Another simple measure of checking if our actions, great or small, meet God's hope is to ask ourselves, "Will my actions heal or wound? If we don't know the answer to that, another measure is "Do my actions require anything of me? "Am I demanding someone or something change without requiring anything of my own behaviors or that includes my own transformation?"

As Jesus is sitting in that garden trying to align his heart and mind with God's hope for the human family he realizes that to stay non-violent to the end, even in the face of the unspeakable violence about to be done to him, the final decision comes down to his own actions. We see him reach the conclusion that as we say nowadays "change begins with him." He accepts the sacrifice of his own life as a way to once and for all demonstrate the ugliness of projecting our human tendency toward violence onto God. And in that act we see an end to the ugly and destructive myth of redemptive violence. Nothing in this world is ever saved, healed or made whole by physical, emotional or social violence. The degradation and oppression of others for any reason is never attached to God's purposes. And, to change the world, our community, our church or our family, we must always begin with ourselves.

Through the terrifying gift of free will God has given us the ability to create or destroy, to heal or to wound, to choose life or to deal death. Every minute of every day can present us with these choices. As we continue to travel this Lenten journey and approach Holy Week, we might take a fearless look at our lives and examine what drives our choices or viewpoints and measure how they align with the prayer: *that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found;*

Grace and Peace, Stephanie+