

Not What I Will, But What You Will

Zechariah 13:7-9, Mark 14:26-52 (ESV)

May 25, 2003

“This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” We recognize these words as Psalm 118, verse 24, with which we begin worship each Sunday morning. What we may not realize is that Jesus sang them with his disciples at the beginning of today’s reading. “When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.” He had just finished his last supper with his disciples. They were celebrating the Passover. And the Passover meal begins with singing Psalms 113 and 114, and it ends with singing Psalms 115, 116, 117, and 118.

Immediately after announcing the new covenant in his blood and predicting his betrayal, immediately prior to leaving the house and plunging into the darkness, and prior to his being betrayed, arrested, deserted, tried, convicted, crucified, killed, and buried, Jesus sang with his disciples, “This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” He knew what was about to happen, and yet he sang the brave and bold words. Here is the savior of the world, your savior and mine, going to his death, going to carry out the work of redemption, to fulfil his calling, to give his life for you and for me, and even then he had the faith and courage to sing to God, “This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” If he could sing that on that night, maybe we can sing it on the hard days of our lives.

Perhaps the only thing more remarkable than verse 24 of Psalm 118 is verse 29: “O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!” With this song on his lips, he went forth to do battle with the powers of evil. These affirmations of the grace and love of God helped sustain and carry Jesus through that dark night and the next day. If he, the Son of God, benefitted from these Psalms, how much more do we need these scriptures!

Now, what is the good news in our reading from the Gospel according to Mark? First, Jesus is betrayed and crucified by the will of God. This is what it means that Jesus quotes Zechariah, in which God says, “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.” Jesus understood this to apply to himself. Jesus went to his death in the will of God, not in any way outside of the will of God. God planned to offer his son as a sacrifice for our sins. All those miserable sinners who were plotting and working against Jesus, the religious leaders of the day who were trying to rid themselves of him, the schemers who thought they were in control of his life and death, all of them acted unknowingly to carry out the prior plan and will of God. Yes, it is hard for us to think about Jesus being betrayed by the will of God

Almighty. But the alternative is to think that he fell victim to sin, death, and evil, consumed by the plots swirling around him. The alternative is to think that the sinners were in control of the day. And that was not the case. What they did was wrong and terrible. But Jesus was not a victim. He was a gift from God. He was sent to do this, for you and for me, and he fulfilled his calling and carried out his mission. Even the death of Christ is not outside the will of God, but is instead part of God's will for you and me. God has planned, provided for, and prepared a wonderful gift for you and for me.

Second, Jesus Christ concurred with God's will for his death. It was not easy. It came with great pain and struggle. But Jesus concurred with God's will for his life and his death. He began to be greatly distressed and troubled. His soul was sorrowful, even unto death. He fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. Here, more than anywhere else, we see the humanity of Christ. Jesus cried out, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Remove this cup from me." He preferred not to be betrayed, tried, convicted, crucified, and buried. And yet, in the depths of prayer, Jesus came to this: "Yet not what I will, but what you will." In full knowledge of the price he was to pay, his pain, suffering, and death, Jesus Christ concurred with the will of God for himself and therefore with the will of God for you and me. "Yet not what I will, but what you will." His life was not taken away from him even by God. He gave it for our sake. "Yet not what I will, but what you will." He died in order that we might live. So, part of the good news in this reading from Mark today is that Christ went according to the will of God. And a second part of the good news is that Christ concurred with the will of God for his own death.

Third, and this is important to make sense out of the first two, the whole purpose of this terrible sacrifice is to form a new covenant people of God. As it is written in Zechariah, "They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'" As Jesus had said during the supper, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." It is not only the case that his blood was poured out. That could have happened for no good purpose. But instead, his blood was poured out "for many." There was a purpose to his sacrifice. There was a meaning to his death. There was a reason for the will of God and for the concurring will of the Son. This was not an accident, or a spectacle, or the whim of the fates. The reason for all of this was the forgiveness of our sins, yours and mine. What happened here was done and suffered for you and me. By these means God is calling us back from sin, death, and evil, and is regathering us to himself, for himself, to be the covenant people of God now and forever. Thanks be to God!

So, part of the good news is that Christ was betrayed and crucified not by the victorious powers of evil but by the direct will of God. A second part of the good news is that Jesus concurred with God's will for his life and death. And the third part is that all of this was for our sake, for the forgiveness of our sin and the gathering of us together into the people of God.

Now, a couple of notes of explanation are in order. First, while what we have read today is essential to the story and gospel of Jesus Christ, it is not the whole story. It is not all of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not only the case that Jesus was betrayed and crucified, but it is also the case that God raised him from the dead. God resurrected him to a new and different life, forever beyond the power of death. God accepted Christ's sacrifice and vindicated his faith and obedience with the gift of new life. That runs ahead of today's reading. But we need to mention that today, because today's reading is too horrible to contemplate without it. We are reading the great sweep of the gospel story. Each part is important to understanding the whole. But the whole picture is important to understanding each part, also. The gospel does not end with betrayal. God's will is not simply crucifixion and death. The will of God is for the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the promise of our own. That is where this is heading.

Second, in this great sweeping plan to reestablish the covenant people of God and to regather a people to and for himself, it strikes me that he did not have much with which to work in those first disciples. Despite Peter's brave bragging, they could not even stay awake with Jesus while he prayed. After all they had seen and heard, they could not even hang in there with him on this last night. They abandoned him for the comfort of sleep, and at the end of the reading they forsook him and fled away into the darkness of the night.

In a strange way, this gives me good hope that maybe there is room for me in the great company of the people of God, somewhere on the back row, in a far corner. I fail God every day. I let down Jesus Christ every day. When I should be brave, I am cowardly. When I should be alert, I am napping. When I should be helping, I am no where to be found. And yet, given what Jesus had to work with in those first disciples, given what he did for them, I am strangely reassured and comforted that he came for me, too. There is room for us in the people of God.

How does this gospel apply to our lives today? First of all, the grace of God made obvious to us in the will of God, in the will of Christ, and in the purpose of forming a people of God moves us to a profound sense of gratitude and thanksgiving. This is the key note in the whole Christian life. God's grace elicits our gratitude. We know the one to whom our thanks are due. We live our lives with hymns of praise and thanksgiving. We remember what God has done for us. We offer God our praise, our gifts, our worship, and our lives. But through this all,

beyond these walls, day to day, moment to moment, we live our lives in an attitude of thanksgiving. This is our first and most important response to the gospel in today's reading.

Second, we are led to, and encouraged in, a life of prayer. Some of this is thanksgiving. Some of this will be confession of our sin and failure. Beyond that, we are led into a prayer of submission to the will of God in our lives. We can pray with Jesus, "not what I will, but what you will." The whole of our lives can become a greater submission to the will of God in, through, and for our lives. If you wish to learn to pray, ask of God what you will. Jesus asked for release from the cross. But end your prayers with this: "not what I will, but what you will." If the Son of God not only involved himself in, but actually needed this prayer, how much more do we need this prayer.

Third, we are called to watchfulness, as were the first disciples. No, we cannot relive that night with them or for them, and it is good that we cannot. We would fail also. But we can try to be watchful now. We can attempt great things for the Lord now. And we are called to an accountability for the stewardship of our lives. I mean not only our money, but also the whole of our lives: heart, soul, mind, and strength. And in order for us to fulfill this, it is important for us to exercise the stewardship of each day.

Ten years ago, I read *Jurassic Park*. The book was about money, power, arrogance, ambition, and the lust for money and power. And with the genetic technology they were using to bring dinosaurs to life, they were playing with things beyond their knowledge and control. There was a mathematician, Dr. Ian Malcolm, who was convinced from the beginning that the whole project was doomed to failure. He did not say that it was likely to fail. He said that it had to fail because it was so complex that there was no way they could pull it off. He based this on a mathematical theory, a chaos theory, a way of looking at the world. And part of this theory is based on fractals. This is an understanding of things which exhibit in their component parts the same characteristics as the whole. One example was a rocky mountain peak. You could look at that from miles away and see how craggy it was. You could break off a piece of rock in your hand and it would have the same rough shape. You could break off a tiny piece of that and look at it under a microscope, and it would have the same rough shape. Every piece of rock had the same shape and characteristics as the whole mountain. That is a fractal. Clouds are similarly composed of fractals. The whole cloud or a tiny wisp of vapor both look the same.

Time works the same way. Our lives work the same way. Dr. Malcolm said, "A day is like a whole life. You start out doing one thing, but end up doing something else, plan to run an errand, but never get there.... And at the end of your life, your whole existence has that same haphazard quality, too. Your whole life has

the same shape as a single day” (Michael Crichton, *Jurassic Park*, p. 171). That caught my attention. How terrible it would be for us to come to the end of our lives and not have done what we intended to do for Jesus Christ! How terrible it would be to come to the end of our lives and find that we had slept through his agonizing prayer on our behalf. Think of the gifts we have been given. Think of the opportunities that have been set before us, the privileges, the tasks, and the duties. God has given each one of us wonderful, particular, specific gifts for the building up of this church and for serving the need of humanity. How terrible it would be if we came to the end of our lives without having used the gift, without ever having thought about the gift, taken it out, unwrapped it, looked at it, or put it to use, and so, in effect, having discarded the gift. And if we do not use it now, today, and we do not use it tomorrow, when are we going to use it? The only way to avoid coming to the end of our lives with gifts unused is to use them today.

What is your gift? God has given us all the gifts we need for the life of this church and the serving of human need in this community. Is your gift to teach? God has always provided teachers for his church. It may be that your gift, the reason for your life, the reason for your existence, the reason you have been called into this congregation, is to teach children, young people, or the adults. When someone invites you to teach, do not take it lightly. Is it your gift to preach? Have you been called to the ministry of the gospel? Is it your gift to give, sacrificially and substantially, to support the work and mission of the church? Is it your gift to invite people here to be a part of this community? Is it your gift to evangelize and share with others the joyful good news of Jesus Christ? Is it your gift to care for those who are sick, those who are sorrowing, or those who are despairing? One or more of these gifts is yours. Seek to discern your gift. Seek to fulfill your calling.

We have in the behavior of the disciples a negative example, remembered in order that we might avoid it. Let us not forsake Christ and flee into the darkness. Let us not come to the end of our lives not having done what Christ wanted us to do, died for us to do, and gave us precious gifts to do. And in order for us not to do that, let us serve Christ well each day. “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.

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