

Your will be done

Psalm 33; Matt 26.36-46

What do you like doing during the summer months? We're experiencing cooler weather now, but think about the end of the year. What are you looking forward to?

I tell you what I like doing. When I can I love to set aside a couple of hours to sit back on the couch with a cool drink under the air conditioning and I love to watch a session of the cricket; test match cricket, the kind where not a lot happens! I know this isn't everyone's idea of a summer afternoon well spent—some would rather stick pins in their eyes—but I love it.

In actual fact, one aspect of the broadcast I like best is the *Cricket Show*: the segment they televise during the lunch break. And the part of the *Cricket Show* I like best is the masterclass. This is where they get one of the commentary team, someone like Shane Warne, or Ian Healy, or Mark Taylor. And they demonstrate how to bowl leg spin play the pull shot, or where to stand if your receiving a throw from the field, or how to play the pull shot. I love it. I think it's fascinating.

And it's not the only time we see a masterclass on the TV, is it? When *Masterchef* is on, Friday night is masterclass night! It's Gary and George's turn to don an apron and all the contestants have their notebooks out because it's time to learn from a master. In both these examples the masterclass is teaching us something quite difficult. Bowling leg spin is difficult. Learning to cook well is difficult. I know because I've made plenty of attempts at both and I find neither of them to be intuitive. To gain any level of expertise we need the tuition of a master.

Here at Waitara Anglican we're half-way through our series on the Lord's Prayer. We're walking through this prayer one line at a time, learning to pray as Jesus taught us to. This week: *Your will be done*. And I've got to say, this has to be one of the most difficult prayers you can pray. It's easy to ask for our daily bread. It's easy to ask that others honour and hallow God's name. But to ask for God's will to be done—even when that will is not what we would chose, even when we can't understand it—that's a really difficult prayer to pray.

But as we read through the pages of the New Testament, what we find deep in the Gospel of Matthew, located many chapters after Jesus first taught the Lord's Prayer, is a masterclass in praying for God's will to be done. On the night before his crucifixion we find Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and he's praying for God's will to be done even though it's not what he wants! Jesus is no hypocrite, he's a man who practices what he preaches. In Matthew 6 he taught his disciples to pray "your will be done" and now, 20 chapters later, when God's will is for him to die on a cross, does he pray something different? No! He prays exactly what he taught his disciples. And the story of how he prayed is preserved for us as a masterclass in praying this difficult prayer.

But before we observe this lesson, let's talk just a little bit about God's will—his secret will, and his revealed will—and why it is that we need the help of a masterclass. There's a great verse in the OT that explains a lot about how God's will works. Moses is speaking to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 29, and in verse 29 he says this: The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law. Moses makes a distinction between secret things belonging to God, and revealed things that have been explained to us. Theologians have taken this verse and they've spoken about God's secret will—things that he commands and plans that he has in place that are secret—and they've spoken about God's revealed will: all the wishes and all the desires of God that he freely communicates to us.

The Bible gives us some great examples of people struggling with God's secret will. One example is the story of Job in the Old Testament. You remember the story: Job is a wealthy and righteous man but then his children are killed and his wealth disappears, and Job has no idea why God has brought this about. His friends suggest that God is punishing Job for hiding a secret sin! But Job is adamant, "I haven't been hiding any sins! Why is this happening?" Now, as readers of Job's story, we know why it's happening, because Job ch1 explains that this is a battle between Satan and God. But Job doesn't know that, he's just left to wonder why God's will for him has turned out this way. It's a secret, and it's a hard secret for Job to accept. "What do you mean God? Your will for me is to lose everything? I'm really not happy with that."

But even when God does reveal his will for us, it can be just as hard to accept. God's revealed will is found in the Bible, and my reading is that God's revealed will is all about the final day when all things will be brought under Christ. God has told us that this is what he's working towards. And so it follows that God's will for us is to live in light of that final day; to put ourselves under Christ in anticipation. The day [of Christ's return] is almost here, Paul says in Romans 13:12 So let us put aside the deeds of darkness. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, [and] not in dissension and jealousy. This is the will of God as it is revealed towards us, and sometimes these are hard things to accept. "I really don't think I can cope unless I drink a lot. Oh the pull of sex outside of marriage is just too strong. I just can't help myself, I have argue back and prove my point". There are plenty of obstacles that we need to overcome in order to do God's will, and so this is why we need a masterclass.

Now when I'm watching the masterclass on the cricket show, I've noticed that the experts will break down the skill into component parts: Here's how you grip the ball, here's how you release the ball, here's where you want the ball to pitch. And when we look at Christ's masterclass in the garden we see that praying for God's will to be done can involve a number of steps.

The first thing that strikes me is that Jesus feels free to express his sorrow; when God's will for us seems too hard to handle, it's ok to express your emotions about it. Open up Matthew 26 if you haven't already and you'll see what I mean. By the time Jesus arrives in the Garden of Gethsemane he already knows what God has willed for him. He's already told his disciples that in Jerusalem he will be killed, and this is a truth that he's struggling with. Verse 38 Jesus says to his friends "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Sometimes we fool ourselves into thinking God expects 'stiff upper lips' from us. I had a former parishioner who received a serious diagnosis of cancer, and he found himself to be much more afraid than what he ever imagined. And then he found his sense of fear started to mix with feelings of sorrow because he felt he was letting God down with his response! "God doesn't want me to be afraid!" he thought, "God wants me to be strong!" But look at Christ's response here! He comes face to face with God's unwelcome will for his life and he's devastated!

I think perhaps the first step is to relearn the biblical practice of lament. When we realize that God's will for our lives is not what we would choose then perhaps crying out to God in sorrow is not a bad place to start; To pray "Lord, you haven't blessed me with the life I want, I'm sad about that. Father, I find myself to be really lonely, I find that really hard! Father, my career always seems to be in neutral. Why can't I catch a break? Lord, why does my family treat me this way?" In fact if we are to trust God then this kind of interaction seems necessary to me. This is what healthy relationships look like. We need to know that God is willing to hear our doubts and fears, and if Christ's example is anything to go by, then we can be sure that he does.

But the masterclass doesn't end there. Next we see Jesus deciding to embrace what God has planned for him: he decides to radically submit himself to God's will. Verse 39, Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will. Against every impulse and despite some of the deepest feelings imaginable Jesus decides to trust his father's plan. Not my will, but yours he prays.

Last week Jas and I took a drive through Asquith to Mt Colah and Hornsby Heights. Lots of neat and well-cared for homes, lots of bushland as well. I could easily imagine a bushfire coming over the ridge and threatening those homes. Now I can imagine that if my house was threatened, I might feel a tension between obeying the will of the authorities to evacuate, and responding to my own will to stay and defend the property. In fact the authorities say that as part of your bushfire survival plan you should decide beforehand whether you're going to flee or going to stay and defend. But they warn us, in certain catastrophic conditions the only viable option is to get out early. In those conditions you've got to resist any desire on your own part to defend your home no matter how much you love it.

I wonder whether we ought to follow a similar wisdom in that, no matter how much we feel the pull of our own desires, we need to decide now to embrace the will of

God as our first priority. When the urge comes to gossip viciously behind someone's back, when our wills suggest silence when a chance to speak of God emerges, when we are tempted to disown God when his sovereignty disappoints us, In those moments may God help us to pray, not my will but yours.

Now, I don't think this moment of strength came out of the blue for Jesus. Throughout Matthew's Gospel Jesus has shown that he knows God's word. When tempted in the desert, he's able to quote scripture back to the devil. Like Psalm 119.11 says, Jesus has hidden God's word in his heart so that he might not sin against his Father. Knowing the word also means Jesus knows the reality of his Father's plan; he knows God never promises life to be full of blue skies and green lights. The way some Christians speak it seems that God only wills comfort for us, but sometimes God asks us to go through some very hard things. However, Jesus also knows that God is working within a bigger picture; he knows that the next three days are going to win salvation for many. It's this greater biblical perspective that helps Jesus accept what's happening.

So submitting to God's will takes training, it doesn't come out of the blue. Successful athletes don't just turn up on game day, they prepare themselves beforehand, and so it is with us. When times are good we need to prepare ourselves for the times of testing. And a life-time spent learning what God's will actually is will help us.

And we do need divine help. While familiarity with God's word is a useful form of training, in this masterclass *praying* for God's strength is a key step for Jesus. Verse 41: "Watch and pray Jesus instructs Peter so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." A very insightful thing for Jesus to say here: The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. As long as we have these bodies made of human flesh we will always find it hard to embrace God's will. We humans are created in a weak state, it won't be until God gives us new bodies in the age to come that we will finally have no problems embracing the will of God.]And so in the meantime we need to seek out divine help.

In high school I always had trouble with maths. For some reason my brain just didn't get it, it was if my wiring was done in a different way. I really did feel that I was at a natural disadvantage. My sister and brother are much better at maths than me and they graciously gave me a lot of tutoring. My brother went on to gain a PhD in maths, so he obviously was formed out a different half of the gene pool! But seeking that outside help enabled me in my weakened state to make it through. You're probably observing this same thing with your kids as they struggle with various subjects.

When it comes to embracing God's will, our weakened human state disadvantages us so we need that outside help. And so when we pray "your will be done", part of what we are praying is for God's help to do his will. This seems to work for Jesus. We notice a slight difference between his prayers in vs 39 and 42. The second time around he doesn't pray for the cup to be taken away, he seems to be accepting what

is about to come his way. Then by the end of the scene he's ready to meet his fate: verse 46 Rise let us go! God's will might seem hard to accept, but if we decide to pray about it, he'll give us strength to endure what he has planned for us.

This is a lesson that that Peter had to learn the hard way. You would have noticed that the disciples failed to join Jesus in prayer; Jesus warns them, Peter in particular, watch and pray so that you don't fall. But they didn't pray, they fell asleep. Peter should have been praying for strength at this critical moment, but instead of prayer he sleeps, and then when the heat is on he falls apart. He cuts off the roman soldiers ear and Jesus rebukes him, he flees from Jesus as the rest of the disciples do, and then he denies Jesus three times and is reduced to a rightful weeping mess.

See where a lack of prayer can land you? Watch and pray so you do not fall, watch and pray that your own will, your own desires, don't rule you at the expense of what God would have you do. That's what we've been taught in the masterclass. Let's hope we haven't been sleeping.

Father we thank you for this episode from Christ's life recorded for us. We praise the name of Jesus on account of his integrity, praying exactly as he taught others to. We ask that when your will seems hard for us to accept, that you'll hear our cries of sorrow and have mercy on our weekend state. Give us the strength to pray for your will to be done in our lives, for Jesus sake, Amen.