

Whats the biggest decision you've ever made? And what do you when you can't decide.? Off you go...

One of the strange things about being a human, is that your brain can tell your brain what to do. You can say to yourself, I am going to meet this person and go for coffee at 10.00 on Wednesday and when that time comes along you find yourself going – oh yes, I must do that now. Other times we find our will is weak. I will get up at 6.00 and exercise. Snooze. I will not eat....choco...chewing noises...

Sometimes a will is strong when you're not even there. When someone dies, we want to fulfil their wishes, we want their 'will to be done'. When I don't go to a meeting, the question what does the vicar want? Can completely upend the meeting - whether or not the vicar has no opinion or is actually an idiot. When if I was there, they might well realise – this man is a buffoon. Sometimes the impression of someone's will – what you think that they want – can be very powerful. How often we wrestle with our anxieties about what this or that person may think – it keeps us up at night! What will they think?! Universities have made an entire business on making you care and about what someone else thinks of you – often so that other people's opinion about you will be improved.

Our focus today is that prayer at the beginning of the Lord's prayer:

'Thy will be done' says Jesus, 'On earth as it is in heaven'.

Thy will be done is a request, a petition, an ask. It flows from those first two – hallowed be your name and your kingdom come.

But it's a strange request. For how can the will of God not be accomplished? Isn't the will of God basically irresistible – doesn't it always occur in every place at all times? The great theologian most associated with predestination, John Calvin, used to say God is Lord over every moment or he is Lord of none and so every raindrop falls at God's discretion; in a colourful passage he says if you fall to robbers in the forest or are thrown over at a storm in a sea – it is not chance or fortune – the word derived from the goddess fortuna – no, you deal with but God himself.

This sense of the irresistible power of God is utterly beautiful and can grant great peace of mind. Principally whatever happens, it is fine. In Islam, you'll often hear them saying 'Inshallah' meaning – if God wills. My friend used to work in disaster relief and when there are earthquakes or floods, Muslims do not say 'where is God?' which western Christians generally ask, instead they say, Inshallah.

But. It's not so easy as that. Because the truth is, everything is not fine. Like at all. We see it around us, we know it in our own lives. God knows this – it's kind of the point of the cross and he steps into our dirt and mess, even taking on sin and death itself in order to break it. The second half of this line recognises the reality.

'On earth as it is in heaven'. In a heavenly reality – where God dwells – there is a sort of seamlessness in a spiritual space – where God's will is unresisted, uncontested and just done. It is done. In star trek language – make it so....But here now, 'on earth' we pray 'thy will be done' because we see and sense that it is not always done. That there is a strange and impossible possibility that the will of God is not done amongst us now. That by giving us freedom, space and real life, the creation can rebel against our creator, and say no. This is good definition of sin, rebellion against the maker. The will of God is perfect and in the end irresistible. There is no version of our world, where in the end God is not glorified, that his creation is not redeemed and yet, his will is big enough that within this world we are allowed choice, freedom and responsibility.

These are complicated theological and philosophical issues that can make your eyes go crossed and I don't pretend to have all of the answers. But in prayer we start to move away from philosophy and into real situation.; the rubber really hits the road though with prayer.

If God's will is done, why do I pray? What is the point? This feels like aha! Trump card no need to pray anymore!!!

First, we pray because Jesus prayed. This whole series on prayer flows from that one question of the disciples, teach us how to pray. That is the son of God incarnate, the one with the closest relationship with the Father – literally Jesus – prays. Jesus prays a lot. If you think back through the other old testament characters, not one of them prayed like Jesus did. His life of prayer was impressive to those around him. You ever been on social media – or at a dinner party and someone really qualified to answer a question, a doctor or a solicitor or judge or police officer is asked something and they begin, when someone who's googled something once, says ACKSHUALLY I read...bla bla bla. I read a lovely note in a doctors office once saying, don't confuse your google search with my 7 year medical training. In prayer we learn from the master, Jesus. If we say there is no point, you need to take it up with him.

Secondly, we find it very hard to get out of hard that prayer is not just about stuff to happen. It's fundamentally a relationship – so when we say 'your will be done' is has an effect on us. Lord your will be done in my life. We are shaped by prayer, like valleys and caves are formed by small water droplets over hundreds of years. So that when we get to a moment, where our will seems to conflict with the will of God, like Jesus once said, we can pray and do – not my will but yours.

Lastly, I don't understand the mechanics of it but when people pray, stuff happens. Those who have a prayer journal often speak about tiny prayers they've forgotten – coming to pass and they'd forgotten they even prayed it. Often this is subtle, quiet things – stuff which otherwise are passed off as coincidences. But when I pray coincidences happen, when I don't they don't. Prayer changes the atmosphere, it changes the feel of a room or a meeting. When I go to a meeting, I often pray in the space beforehand for that meeting. I don't get why that works, but it does. Prayer changes stuff.

Now last little thing for you today – when was the last time you saw prayer working in a situation? I wonder if you can tell the person next to you. Can be big or small. Off you go.

What I haven't covered today is discerning the will of God and how to do it – I'll produce an extra slice on that topic.

Lastly, what is the situation right now you're facing that we need to pray into? Let's do that now.