

THE LOHD'S PRAYER
"Thy will be done"

(On January 17, 1965 Dr. Terpstra began a series of messages on the Lord's Prayer. The following sermon is the fourth in this series).

The recent disaster which was experienced in Keapuka helps one to pinpoint a widely accepted view in regard to the will of God. While the flood waters were still raging there were people associated with Blackfield Enterprises who were asserting that this disaster was beyond the control of man" This meant that no man or human agency could be blamed and thus be held **responsible** for this tragic loss. More recently the City Council, after study of the situation by the City Dept. of Engineering received this report: the flash flood was "an act of God." Thus it is seen that an "act of God" in our Legal terminology is almost synonymous with catastrophe. Let me further illustrate by this quotation from a document: " ... subject only to unavoidable delay caused by strikes" public enemies, and acts of God," - "strikes, public enemies and acts of God ... indeed" a notable categorizing of ideas. This sort of identity has led to associating the will of God, the acts of God, with everything that is disagreeable, painful, and heartrending in life. In this frame of mind to pray "thy will be done" is to toss in the towel.

On the personal level the same thing has happened. An automobile accident, the tragic loss of a young life, and the inscription which goes on the tombstone: "thy will be done." Throughout history lives claimed by the raging of malaria, small-pox or infantile paralysis have too often been said to have succumbed to the will of God Lives lost in industrial accidents and automobile wrecks have had the same epitaph put on their tombstone"

I recognize that we must have some term to designate that which is beyond the control of man. I think all of us realize that beyond man is nature as seen in So earthquakes, rains, tidal waves and draughts. Behind nature is God. So in one sense, the present designation used, "Act of God," makes sense.

However, in other aspects, it does not make sense at all. It is not God's will that men should die from cancer, earthquake or airplane wreck. Medical men and scientists did not accept this view in regard to malaria, small pox and infantile paralysis. Rather, eventually, they made a contribution of quinine, vaccination and the Salk pill. Seat belts and car blinkers; hard helmets and proper shoes have saved lives on our highways and in our industries. Constantly we should study the cause of the loss of life and grapple with these causes, rather than accept the consequences as the will of God.

May I say this morning that God is aware of the problems of automation, of the population explosion, of starvation, of racial and cultural prejudice, and has an answer, -not for those who accept this as the will of God,- but for those who, in humility coupled with dedication and hard work, will be workers together with God in finding a solution.

"Thy will be done." This phrase is thus not equivalent with fatalism. God's will is not everything that is disagreeable, painful and heartrending. It is not synonymous with catastrophe. This prayer began with the words "Our Father." Behind the will of God is a person, a person with the understanding of a Father. Behind the will of God is not a cold machine, but the heart of a Father. When we say "thy will be done we must also remember that He is the Father in heaven. His ways and

thus his will are above the ways and will of man, and thus, often, inscrutable to mankind. Yet the profound depth and height of His way and will does not negate in any sense his Father's heart. "Hallowed be thy name," - his name is holy; his character righteous. His ways, his will for man does not operate from ruthlessness, arbitrariness and meaninglessness. If Thy kingdom come ... on earth as it is in heaven." - God has a kingdom and his Son the Lord Jesus Christ is the King. The kingdoms of this earth one day shall become the kingdom of our Lord and He shall reign forever and ever. The end of all things is clear; there is a plan for this universe; there is a Divine will, understanding and heart operative in the affairs of men.

Yet, I am inclined to feel that when we pray "thy kingdom come" we think of a whole panoramic scene; of the nations of the world seen in their entirety; of rule, of government which holds sway over all. It is a total, corporate view seen way off there, quite removed from your life and mine.

To me when we proceed to the third petition, "thy will be done," then we see matters as more personal, individualistic; as being pertinent, urgent and practical rather than removed, futuristic and dealing with humanity collectively. When we pray "thy will be done" we are making the prayer personal-- may I fit my life into God's plan, may I submit myself to God, may I know what God is doing and join in this mission.

Furthermore, when we pray "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," we recognize with Jesus who taught us the prayer that man on earth does not now do God's will. Man cannot say with Jesus, "My food is to do the will of my Father in heaven." We want our own way. We desire to do as we please. Our food, our nature, is to do our own will. We are ego-centric. We don't desire to surrender our wills to anyone other than self. To have confidence in oneself is not wrong. To have no self-respect is to be spineless, a jelly-fish, a misfit in society, sick. The Word of God even says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" - as thyself. A certain amount of self love, of self confidence, is healthy, is necessary for normal life. But man has an over-dosage. He is out-of-proportion. He is selfish, egotistical, turned in upon himself. This is the meaning of sin. -

When Jesus taught us to pray "thy will be done" it was not a prayer to give up on one's self. Not at all, rather, it is a prayer to abandon the unreal self, the usurper to the throne of our life, in order to find our real self in God, the new life in God. That is what Jesus meant when he said that he that loses his life shall find it. We lose the masked self to discover the true image. Thus this petition could be reworded from "thy will be done" to "may I really discover who I am, my real self."

For the Christian person this petition seeks Divine guidance for life: "thy will be done. May my life be directed by God. Often I am asked "how may I know God's will for my life? Should a person go on to college ... to what college ... what about a major? Should I accept this offer of a new job? Should I think seriously about this girl, this fellow?"

May I say at once that God does not deal in pat answers, in easy solutions. Our Lord sweat drops of blood as He prayed in Gethsemane, "not my will but thine be done." However, we must immediately add that God has made Himself known. We know of His character, His way with men, as we look at the life of Jesus in the Bible, - as we look at God's acts both in the Old and New Testaments as He encounters men. General guide lines are given in the Word of God. As Protestants we do say the Scriptures

are our standard, our guide, for faith and practice. It has been a real blessing to me to remind myself that the same Holy Spirit who inspired the men who wrote this Book Indwells me. The same is true of you. In my search for meaning in this Word I may honestly cry out for ability to **know** and discern God's will to the One Who is the author of the Holy Scriptures, and who encountered men in days gone by"

We men are made in the image of God. We have heads upon our shoulders to reason with... We have been **endowed with** this rational power in order to use it. God does not very often by-pass common sense for dreams, writings on the wall, or picking scripture verses with closed eyes. We are able to know ourselves, our abilities, our special capacities by tests as well as by experience. Around us are friends whose judgment we respect. We are able to test our inclinations with other's evaluation. We are able to assess past decisions we have been asked to make. We can pray for a certain kind of selflessness in making the decision, certain neutrality, a willingness to be directed this way or that. We can pray for God to open and shut doors through what we commonly call circumstances.

Yet after we have said all this--there may be much more to be said. I have discovered in life, and undoubtedly you have, too, that in the course of one's years tangible evidences have been removed in the process of making decisions. Once there may have been a fleece like Gideon's, at times a pillar **cloud** as given to Moses. Later, however, we are asked to make decisions when there is no clear sign-post seen. In our indecision we may cry out as the Psalmist to have the way made straight and visible, but nothing happens. Openings which seemed quite logical close one after the other, while a door to something almost impossible remains open and we can't understand why. It is these periods of waiting, of indecision, of inability to understand, that test us,

I suggest this morning that when we recognize that we walk by faith and not by Sight that this procedure is only natural. As we grow in God's ways, one by one, tangible evidence is removed to lead us from faith to faith, to more faith. Yet, in some way, perhaps, through a still small voice, or finally through an inner calmness we receive assurance that this is the path, and we hear the inner voice- "walk ye in it."

I certainly want you to understand this morning that the will of God is not synonymous with catastrophe, with all that is disagreeable and painful, - that it is a kill joy. To be in the center of a loving Father's will is the most joyous place on earth. To trust and obey is truly the only way to be happy. Don't shy away from asking for God's will in your life.

However, may I turn the coin over for a moment. To pray "thy will be done" is to erect the sign, "travel at your own risk." Life is not one of evolution, of gradual progress. It is rather made up of Calvaries and Easters, of crosses and resurrections, of deaths, and risings again. The self that masquerades as our real self is a tough hombre. He is felled with one blow. He keeps getting up before the count of **10**. There continues to be something awfully attractive about my will and your will, and something ethereal and abstract about the will of God. "Thy will be done" must be a continuous prayer stemming from the attitude: "I die daily."

In closing, may we all remind ourselves that none is ever truly happy in doing his own will,- living for the superficial self. True meaning to life and eternal life come when we lose the old self through death with Christ to discover the true self in being raised to new life in Christ. There is a tone of joy and victory in these words: "thy will be done." There has been a conflict, a struggle, a battle within, then the words, "thy will be done," Why not utter these words of surrender this morning? It is not his will that any should perish but that all should come unto life. He who keeps his life shall lose it, but he who loses his life for Christ's sake shall find it.