

GOD'S WILL AND OURS

Hosea 2:14-20; Psalm 103:1-13, 22; 2 Corinthians 3:1-6; Mark 2:13-22

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"(The Lord said)

I will now allure her... and speak tenderly to her.

I will give her... a door of hope.

I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth.

I will make for you a covenant

I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land

I will make you lie down in safety.

I will take you for my wife in faithfulness

and you will know the LORD." Hosea 2:14-20

"(The LORD)

will not always accuse, nor

will he keep his anger forever." Psalm 103

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN

I want to talk about the will of God this morning. Listen to three stories that force us to think about the will of God. Leslie Weatherhead wrote, "I have a good friend whose wife died. After her death he said, 'I've just got to accept it. It's the will of God.' But he's a doctor and for weeks he'd been fighting to save her life. He'd called in specialists. He used all the marvels of modern medical technology. He prayed for his wife to be healed. But she died and so her husband said, 'It's the will of God.' Was he, then, fighting against the will of God trying to heal her? If she'd recovered, wouldn't he call her recovery the will of God?" Is the will of God, simply whatever happens - car accidents, plane crashes, tornadoes, earthquakes, and cancer?

When William Sloane Coffin's son was killed in a tragic car accident a well meaning woman stopped by his house with some casseroles and said to him, "I just don't understand the will of God." Coffin was enraged. "I'll say you don't, lady!" he said to the shocked woman. "Do you think it was the will of God that Alex never fixed that lousy windshield wiper of his, that he was probably driving too fast in a storm, that he probably had a couple beers too many? Do you think it's God's will that there aren't streetlights along that stretch of road, and no guard rail?" Then Coffin tells us, "Nothing so infuriates me as the incapacity of seemingly intelligent people to get it through their heads that God doesn't go around this world with his finger on

triggers, his fist around knives, his hands on steering wheels. God is dead set against all unnatural deaths. The one thing that should never be said when someone dies is 'It's the will of God.' My own consolation lies in knowing that it was *not* the will of God that Alex die; that when the waves closed over the sinking car, God's heart was the first to break."

But now listen to *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. Whenever I hear these chilling words I'm glad that I, as a Presbyterian Minister, don't have to affirm every single word in the entire *Book of Confessions*. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* says that God from all eternity willed some to everlasting death. These, are so designed and their number is so certain and definite that it can't be diminished. In other words, God has willed that some people perish everlasting in hell and there's nothing they can or will do about it. Friends, Calvinism gone to seed. ^{This is} That's fatalism. Don't believe it!

Let's talk about the will of God. Our Old Testament lesson from Hosea indirectly addresses the question of the will of God. No other prophet is quite like Hosea. We know more ^{He lived 7-8 yrs before Christ, Northern Kingdom} about the personal life of Hosea than any other prophet. Hosea had a terrible marriage. His wife, ^{Gomer,} left him not once or twice but many times. She slept around with a lot of other men. She had children to other men while she was still married to Hosea. We don't know why Gomer acted like this. Maybe she was physically or sexually abused as a child. Maybe Hosea spent so much time preaching and prophesying that he didn't keep the home fires burning. Maybe she suffered from some emotional illness. Maybe she just enjoyed what she was doing. We don't know. ^{The Bible calls her a sinner} We have a very difficult time talking about sin today. We think of sin either in terms of crime (stealing or murder) or in terms of sickness. Today we probably wouldn't call Gomer a sinner. We'd probably say, "She's sick. There's something terribly wrong with her."

But Hosea tells us that he never gave up on his wife. Time after time he takes her back. Time after time she humiliates him. He endures the ongoing humiliation. Most of us today would say, "It's Hosea's who sick. Why put up with her? Why not just divorce her?"

Nobody would blame Hosea if he *had* divorced her. Just like today, sometimes marriages don't work. People get divorced. And I thank God that we no longer ostracize

divorced people. I'm glad we welcome divorced people. I'm glad divorced people are permitted and encouraged to share their gifts of leadership in the church. Nobody would blame Hosea if he divorced his wife.

But he didn't. He couldn't stop loving her. He couldn't stop hoping that their marriage could be salvaged. He couldn't stop thinking of how they once loved one another. And God used their troubled marriage to tell us about God's will for us. Now I don't believe that God wills for us to live in terrible marriages any more than I believe cancer is God's will. But the story of Hosea tells us that God's will is always to bring something good out of tragedy. That doesn't help much when we're experiencing a tragedy. We're too numb. We're too hurt and angry to find much comfort in believing that God will bring something good out of our pain. And yet I believe that if we all firmly trusted that God is going to win in the end - and that God's will *will* be done in the end - we'll have hope to face whatever comes our way.

Like Gomer, we stray, we delay, we turn to other gods. We forget God. Some of us go for years without ever coming home to God. But God wills to save us, to forgive us, to betroth us, to prepare us for life with him. God is a lover. Listen to what the Lord says.

*"(The Lord said)
I will now allure her... and speak tenderly to her.
I will give her... a door of hope. ^{in some ways}
I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth.
I will make for you a covenant
I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land
I will make you lie down in safety.
I will take you for my wife in faithfulness
and you will know the LORD." Hosea 2:14-20*

The God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ does for us exactly what Hosea did for his wife Gomer. He never gives up on us. God does not force his will on us. He allures us. He woos us. He speaks tenderly to us. He gives us a door of hope when everything seems lost. He intends to reshape and remake us so that we will love and serve him.

D.T. Niles, the Sri Lankan preacher who has influenced my thinking and believing so much once told the story of three young French university students. They were walking along the road one Good Friday afternoon. They were unbelievers. ^{in some ways they were like Hosea -} They cared nothing for God, either

doing God's will or seeking God's will. They noticed crowds of people going to churches to confess their sins so they could take Holy Communion on Easter. The students mocked these unenlightened believers and debated how much longer Christianity could survive in a modern, scientific world. Suddenly two of the students dared the more outspoken of the three. They dared him to go into a church and tell the priest what they'd been discussing. And when you're a young man and someone dares you it's pretty hard not to take the dare. So he stood in line to the confessional booth and when his turn came he entered, shut the curtain, looked at the priest and arrogantly said, "Father, I'm not here to confess my sin. I believe that's a bunch of hogwash. I've come merely to tell you that Christianity is a dying institution and that religion is a superstition." And with that he got up to leave. But the priest looked at the young man trying to figure out his motives. "Why did you come?" The student cavalierly told him about the dare.

The priest listened intently and then said, "I have a dare for you." And when you're a young man and someone dares you it's pretty hard not to take the dare. The priest said, "Go into the sanctuary. You'll see a large wooden cross on the wall and on the cross you'll see the figure of Jesus crucified. I ^{dare} want you to stand before that cross and say, 'Jesus died for me and I don't give a damn.' The student looked diffident but he took the dare. ~~He~~ We swaggered into the sanctuary, found the crucifix, stood before it and said defiantly, "Jesus died for me and I don't give a damn." He returned to the priest. "Well, I've done it." "Wait a second. Just do it again. After all, it means nothing to you. It's just a unenlightened superstition." The student went back and looked at the cross again. He looked more closely at the figure of Christ. Jesus hung heavily on the cross. His shoulders looked dislocated. And on the face of Christ the young man could see the pain and tragedy of the whole world. He looked longer than he had intended. Then he quickly blurted out the words. "Jesus died for me and I don't give a damn." He returned to the priest and said, "I'm going now." The priest stopped him. "Once more." "No father, I don't want to." "I dare you. This is the last time. I promise." So the young man walked up to the crucifix again in the darkened sanctuary, votive candles flickering. He stood there for a long time. He looked at the body, pierced and torn with nails. and he saw the

battlefields of time. He saw the mangled dead, the gaping wounds. He saw the widows worn and haggard. He saw the pain of world's oppressed. The pain of the cancer patient. The suffering of the poor.^{He saw all in hunger, laid on the bed in Elbert} Time stopped for him. When he finally came to, he returned to the priest and said, "Father, I have sinned. Please hear my confession."

The cross of Christ reveals to us God's will. God has willed to take upon himself all the sin, suffering, pain and tragedy of the world. God has done this in Jesus Christ. God's will is to allure us. To speak tenderly to us. God's will is to give us a door of hope. God wills to remove the names of all the other gods we worship from our mouth. God wills to make for us a covenant that God will never break. He wills to abolish the bow, the sword, and war. God wills for us to lie down in safety. God's will is to take us to himself as his own bride. God will not always accuse nor will he keep his anger forever. God's will is for us to will his will and to know and enjoy God forever.

Almighty God,
renew us through the gift of your Spirit,
that we may always do and think
what is just in your sight,
that we, who can do nothing good without you,
may live according to your holy will;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen.