

The Rev. Joel Petruschke
Our Saviour Lutheran Church
September 12, 2021
Pentecost 16

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, there may be nothing so comforting, so reassuring as knowing what is God's plan for our life.

There is nothing so encouraging as knowing what God would have each of us do when we wake up on any given morning.

There is nothing so promising, so inspiring, so confidence inducing as knowing that God has a purpose, that God has a goal for our lives each and every day.

And come what may, whether we are hit by bane or blessing...

And come what may, whether we are faced with the unexpected or the out of left field...

And come what may, whether we are confronted by trial and tribulation...

Regardless of the obstacles before us, to know God's plan for our life empowers us to meet whatever challenges we might encounter.

I think this is why Jesus was able to go to the cross.

I think this is why our Lord was able to give his life for the sake of the world.

I think this is why Jesus could stare down death, and go to his place of execution on Golgotha

This was God's plan for his life.

He had to endure crucifixion, he could not do otherwise.

Yes, the only way Jesus' suffering and death makes any sense whatsoever is if Jesus understood that the cross was his purpose, his goal...that the cross was God's will.

And our gospel passage today says as much.

Now, this gospel passage for today is that which is known as the Confession of St. Peter.

Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"

And the disciples answer, "John the Baptist. Elijah. One of the prophets."

Indeed, it seems the general populace isn't sure.

But then Jesus asks the disciples, "But who do you say that I am?"

And Peter boldly answers, "You are the Messiah." Ding, ding, ding...on to the bonus round.

And then the text says that Jesus began to teach the disciples that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected, and killed, and after three days rise again.

The Son of Man **MUST UNDERGO** great suffering, and be rejected, and killed, and after three days rise again.

Now the word here in Greek that is translated "must undergo" is "day", spelled delta, epsilon, iota; the Greek letters for D-E-I.

And this Greek word "day" is better translated as "it is divinely necessary."

"Must undergo" does not capture the true import of "day."

Instead of Jesus beginning to teach his disciples that he must undergo great suffering, and be rejected, and killed, and on the third day rise again.

Instead, Jesus is saying that it is divinely necessary that these things should happen.

It is the divine plan for Jesus' life.

It is God's purpose and goal for Jesus' life.

It is God's will.

Thus, Jesus understood what his life entailed when he woke up each day.

Thus, Jesus understood that his life was moving inevitably toward the cross.

Now granted, that is not something any person in that time would look forward to - to be crucified.

It is not something any of us would welcome.

But even so, Jesus knew with every ounce of his being...

He knew God's plan to the very core of his person.

He knew God's purpose for his life.

And, the only way we can begin to rationalize the crucifixion is to recognize that there is some comfort, some measure of peace in knowing what it is exactly that you are to do with your life.

Even if it means going to the cross.

It is divinely necessary Jesus taught his disciples.

It is divinely necessary that he suffer, and be rejected, and killed, and on the third day rise again.

It is "day."

PAUSE

Now, this divine plan of God, that his Son should suffer and die, probably gives us pause.

This divine plan of God, that Jesus should be crucified, strikes us no doubt as strange.

God's plan is to send someone, his own Son even, to execution seems misplaced.

God wills suffering? God wills death, particularly death on a cross?

That is hard for us to swallow, perhaps because it would imply that we ourselves are to accept the suffering and hardship we encounter in our lives, because it is God-ordained.

That is hard to swallow.

That is almost like saying that God wills hurricanes, or forest fires, or a pandemic, or the twenty-year war in Afghanistan.

That God wills terrorist attacks, and racism, and hunger and poverty.

Saying that God wills suffering and death just doesn't make sense.

We cringe then to think what God wills for our individual lives, if it was God will for Jesus to suffer and die by a cross.

It is as though suffering and hardship is our fate, our destiny.

It is almost like the belief that given the primordial elements in the universe that it was inevitable that we would end up with the world as we have it.

That it was inevitable that helium and hydrogen gas there at the dawn of creation would coalesce and form stars.

And that it was inevitable that those stars would generate heavier elements in their cores and then spew them out into the universe when those stars imploded.

And then it was inevitable that those heavier elements would form planets.

And that it was inevitable that the planet Earth would develop life.

And that it was inevitable that life would evolve into intelligent life, which was capable of stealing, killing, lying, declaring war, enacting genocide, destroying species and environments, and capable of doing any number of other horrific deeds.

Saying that God wills suffering and death is kind of like saying the evolution of the universe inevitably would lead to the broken world as we know it.

But, the fact is, sisters and brothers in Christ, God did not so much will suffering and death for his Son Jesus, as God willed the redemption of the world through the power of love.

In the same way God willed the universe in existence out of God's great capacity to love.

God did not so much make the human race to experience suffering and hardship...

God did not so much make you and me, and all people, so as to destroy itself and the world in which we live - why would God do that?

No, God does not will suffering and death.

But God does will love.

And that THAT, friends, is what we witness in the God ordained suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ - we witness God's will to love humanity and all creation.

In Christ Jesus, we witness God's abundant capacity to love, not to destroy.

When we think then of what God's plan is for our individual lives, for you and me, and for all people...

When we think of what God's plan is for all human beings, that plan begins and ends with love.

We might get up in the morning and know what we need to do that day, whether it is that we need to go to work, or that we need to take care of our family, or that we need to do housework or other chores.

We might know exactly what it is that we are to do today...

We might know our purpose and our goal each and every day...

And that is comforting and that is reassuring, but if love is not the motivating force for what we do, than our goal, than our purpose is misplaced.

If love is not the motivator for what we do than God's will does not empower us.

If love is not the motivator, our actions count for nought.

The apostle Paul said, "If I have the ability to speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am just a noisy gong or a clanging symbol."

"If I have prophet powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, but do not have love, I am nothing."

"And if have all faith so as to remove mountains, and if I give away all my possessions and hand over my very body, but do not have love, I gain nothing."

If I go to work and do what I am supposed to do, but do not do my work out of love, but just for the sake of earning a paycheck, I am nothing.

If I have chores at home, and I do those chores but am miserable about doing those chores such that I upset those around me—if I don't do my chores out of love, I am nothing.

If I have to care for my family, but do so begrudgingly, and not out of love, I am nothing.

You see, Friends, it is quite simple.

The apostle Paul paints a picture by which we are to interpret our life.

In short, Paul explains that the Christian life is defined by love.

The Christian life has a purpose, has a goal, that is shaped by love.

But the problem is that we often allow ourselves to forget what is God's purpose and goal for us.

We often forget what is God's will for the world, and for all of us who move and have our being in it.

Too often we forget, or become cynical, or angry, or disillusioned by life and by others, and we forget that we have been made to love.

It is divinely necessary, divinely ordained that we love.

When it comes to our own well-being, the well-being of others, and the well-being of the world at large, we really can do no other than that for which God has made us, otherwise we see what happens to us and the world.

That little word in our gospel passage for today speaks volumes.

That little word "day" reminds us of God's plan, not only for his Son Jesus Christ, but also for all of us.

That little word "day" reminds us that when our feet hit the ground in the morning, every action, every word, every thought, should be focused on what is divinely necessary, that we embody and give witness to the power of love.

Anything short of that and we are falling short of who God has made us to be.

And let me reiterate that even though we might be upset by the circumstances of life...

Even though we might feel overwhelmed with hardship...

Even though we might feel wounded and angry, God's will for us doesn't change.

Even in those times when we experience hurt, and perhaps most especially when we have been hurt, it is divinely necessary for us to demonstrate the power of God's love in us.

For love counters that cynicism, that disillusionment, that bitterness that wants to swell up in us.

For only love has the power to heal the world.

Only love has the power to heal the world.

Only love has the power to heal the world.

And you and me, have been made by God to love.

It is divinely necessary that we love for the healing of ourselves and the healing of the world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.