

Palm Sunday
Matthew 26-27

There's a lot we could cover from today's Gospel. I'd like to spend our time today meditating upon God's revealed will and God's hidden will. Our confessions talk about the hidden and revealed will mostly in the section on predestination and eternal election which will conclude our meditation today. First, let's look at what I mean by God's hidden and revealed will.

God's revealed will is found in His Word. The Ten Commandments reveal to you God's will for your lives. The Gospel promises reveal to you God's saving promises for your person.

By nature, you have a basic understanding of God's Law because He wrote it on your heart. Even though it is obscured by Original Sin, every human being has a sense of right and wrong. Kids especially show that the moral law is written on our hearts. Just try giving a group of kids different size pieces of birthday cake! But even though you have a basic sense of right and wrong, you still need to be informed by God's Word that you are a sinner and that you commit actual sins. As Paul says, "If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin." (Romans 7:7)

What happened? Even though your natural man has a sense of right and wrong, it's oriented wrong because of original sin. We love to apply the Law to others and ignore it for ourselves. Or we like to beat up ourselves over our warped sense of right and wrong and ignore actual right and wrong. That's a big reason why we need the Law of God. It shows us what actual sin is. We call this the mirror function of the Law.

But you are a Christian and you have the Holy Spirit. The Law not only shows you your sin, but it actually shows you what good works are. God the Holy Spirit teaches you what your sin is and what good works you should be doing. He also teaches you to apply the Law to yourself and grace towards others. That's the right orientation of the Law of God.

Of course, if you are a judge, or parent, or pastor, you do have responsibility to apply the Law according to your office.

But it's not good enough to hear the Law once. You need to continue to hear the Law so you can know it better and better. Luther says it this way in his preface to the Large Catechism: "It must be true that whoever knows the Ten Commandments perfectly must know all the Scriptures. So, in all matters and cases, he can advise, help, comfort, judge, and decide both spiritual and temporal matters. Such a person must be qualified to sit in judgment over all doctrines, estates, spirits, laws, and whatever else is in the world." (LC Preface.17)

Let's look at the sixth commandment as an example. "What is the sixth commandment? You shall not commit adultery. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other." (SC) It's obvious from this that any sex outside of marriage is sinful. It's also obvious that pornography, prostitution, and sodomy are wrong. What's not so obvious is how best to honor your spouse. It certainly involves keeping the sixth commandment in thought, word, and deed, but it may involve sacrificing your wants for the desires of your spouse for a season.

Unless you are already married, this commandment doesn't reveal whom you are to marry. This is what we call God's hidden will. God knows everything that will happen. There's nothing that surprises God. That doesn't mean, however, that everything is planned out from our perspective. You are not robots whom God controls like a video game. In regard to salvation, you have no free will thanks to original sin. But in regard to your day-to-day life, you have an incredible amount of freedom in how you live. In regard to your salvation, God has a definite plan for your life, namely, Christ. In regard to your day-to-day life, God does not have a definite plan even though He knows exactly what will happen.

Now God does have some requirements on whom you are to marry. They ought to be a Christian. Many times, young people give their heart away to someone at college and it draws them away from the Faith because that person isn't a Christian. Also, the person you marry ought not be a criminal like a drug dealer or prostitute. If that person repents and comes to the faith, of course, they are eligible to marry if they aren't already married. But the young Christian doesn't look for a criminal as a spouse.

Most of you are married. So why am I talking about something that's a done deal for you? It's a great example of how people attempt to use the Word of God to look into God's hidden will. When someone has a dilemma on whom to marry, God does not give them a sign. Either in His Word or in events in their life. When you have a dilemma on what to do, God does not give you signs. Either in His Word or in events in your life. God doesn't direct you what job or car or house to get. It is sinful to test God this way. This is attempting to look into God's hidden will.

You see this happen to married people who question whether they married the right person or not. This is diabolical. The early church had a lot of adult converts. Paul's advice to them from the Lord was that they remain married to the unbeliever. (1 Corinthians 7:10-16) Once you're married, God's will is revealed. He compares your marriage to Christ and the church and says many times and many ways that He hates divorce.

Today we see God's will fully revealed in Christ. It is summarized best by two verses: Isaiah 53:10 and Romans 3:26.

"But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, [by the way, His offspring means you] He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand." (NASB)

The ESV translation really does a poor job with Isaiah 53:10 so you just heard the NASB version which is much better.

“It was to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

These two verses highlight what’s going on in Matthew 26 and 27. But to understand it fully, we need to know that Jesus wasn’t forced to undergo this. In John 10, during the Good Shepherd discourse, Jesus clearly states that no one takes His life from Him. He lays it down of His own will. (vv. 1-18) This is not some cosmic child abuse like some atheists have claimed. But it is ugly. And it is God’s revealed will.

It was God’s will that Jesus be abandoned by His friends. Judas Iscariot betrayed Him. Peter outright denied Him. Not once, but three times. Most of the others fled. John and Mary and Mary and a few friends watched helplessly as they could do nothing to help. The crowds that loved to listen to Jesus and see His miracles turned into a throng that yelled, “Crucify Him!”

But this was God’s will. Jesus, “true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary,” was the only one who could face the wrath of God over your sin.

It was God’s will that Jesus be tried unjustly by man. Man’s justice fails time and time again. Even though man’s justice fails often, God still uses it for His purposes. God’s purpose was for Jesus to receive capital punishment in one of the most gruesome ways invented. It was God’s will that the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world be esteemed a sinner and crucified amongst the worst of them.

God must punish sin. It would go against His character to let it go unpunished. Justice is one of God’s most amazing traits. He cares for the fatherless, the widow, and the sojourner. He poured out His wrath on the innocent Man instead of those who deserve it so that those who deserve it could receive grace through faith.

The grace of God is even more amazing than His justice. Jesus is counted as the sinner and you are counted as righteous! In this way God maintains His justice and He becomes the justifier of the one who has faith in Him.

This is God's revealed will for you. Your sins are forgiven. Jesus paid the price for them on the cross and distributes that forgiveness through Word and Water and Bread and Wine. When we talk about God's revealed will for you, we're talking about predestination and election.

God chose you before the foundation of the World in Christ. He didn't save you because He looked forward in time and saw how you would respond to the preaching of His Word. He, instead, chose you. Your salvation is all His doing. The cause of your salvation is God's election of you and not your response to the Gospel. And this is incredibly comforting. As Paul says,

"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

God's will revealed to you in your Baptism is that you are His child. God's will revealed to you in the Absolution is that your sins are forgiven and not counted against you. God's will revealed to you in preaching in the Lord's Supper is that He is for you and not against you!

Like God didn't reveal the why to Job for his suffering, He doesn't reveal to you why what happens in your life happens. God doesn't reveal why some reject their baptism. God doesn't reveal to you whether you should go to this college or that college. He doesn't reveal to you whether you should take this job or that job. He doesn't reveal to you whether you should keep working or retire.

You have the Ten Commandments and your sanctified reason and Christian friends who help you navigate your day-to-day life the best you can. God will continue to bless you because you are His precious child. Even when you make dumb decisions.

Thanks be to God, He doesn't hide His will from you in terms of salvation. He makes it clear in His Word and Sacraments that you are forgiven and stand righteous before Him. He made this happen by the passion of our Lord.

It's the tradition of the church and Christians to read the passion accounts of Jesus during Holy Week which starts today with St. Matthew's account. I encourage you to read through them this week. As you read them, marvel at the steadfastness of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as He suffers on your behalf. His active obedience in obeying the Law of God perfectly and His passive obedience in giving Himself over to death on a cross both work as the source of your salvation. And His work is trustworthy!

In Jesus' name. Amen.