

**The Circumstantial and Ultimate Will of God (revised)
Matthew 7: 21-23; Ephesians 5:6-20**

**Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
August 19, 2018**

So...I'm in the chair at my dentist's office, and we're chit-chatting about the weather forecast:

Would we be hit with the big storm, as predicted, or not? My dentist's outlook is summarized in his statement: "If it's going to happen...it's going to happen!"

We're pretty good friends...he knows I'm clergy...he's a sort of eclectic Jewish guy...so I said:

"With a philosophy like that, you could help write my sermons on the Will of God!" That reminded him of a joke he just had to tell me. This is all before he takes a look at the problem in my mouth!

There was this very prayerful man pleading: "God, help me win the lottery! Please let me win the lottery!" Days passed, weeks went by, with no results. The man continued to pray earnestly: "O God, please let me win the lottery! Please help me win the lottery!" Still no success. But the religious man continues his prayer: "Please God, let me win the lottery!" Finally God answers: "YOU HAVE TO BUY A TICKET!"

My dentist's wisdom? Sometimes the Will of God needs our help!

This is the midpoint of a three-part sermon series considering the Will of God, with credit to Leslie Weatherhead and his book by the same title. Leslie Weatherhead was a revered British preacher of the 20th century. Last Sunday, the first sermon in the series was titled "God's Intentional Will": that is, God's ideal purposes. Weatherhead says that we must not conclude

that every disaster or death or disappointment is intended by God, for that would not be consistent with the loving, caring God who created us, and who wishes only what is good for us.

Today's sermon pursues two additional insights: First, God's Circumstantial Will—that is, how evil circumstances may momentarily counter God's ideal purposes. Second, God's Ultimate Will—that is how God's ideal purposes may finally be realized, though temporarily derailed.

Next Sunday: Discerning God's Will—that is, how can we know? In whatever has happened or is happening to us...in whatever we are anticipating or dreading or deciding...how can we for certain discern what was...or is...or would be the Will of God?

(Story of Crissy crawling on porch in Lodi; tragedy avoided; God's Will?)

Here is Leslie Weatherhead's explanation of God's Circumstantial and Ultimate Will:

"There is an intentional purpose of God for every person's life...but because of human folly and sin...because (our) free will creates circumstances of evil that cut across God's plans...because our oneness with the great human family means that the evil among other members of it may create circumstances which disturb God's intention for us...there is a will within the will of God, or what I call 'the circumstantial will of God'; and in the doing of that the soul can find peace, the mind can find poise, and the will can be so expressed that ultimately the original plan of God is brought to successful fruition."

The Washington Post reported on the death of Richard Winters, at the age of 92, from Parkinson's disease. Dick Winters was a decorated Army major whose leadership in the European theatre of World War II was featured in the book and miniseries "Band of Brothers". After graduating from Franklin and Marshall College in 1941, what might have been his plans, or

God's plan for him, if he had not enlisted for hazardous duty as a paratrooper, in response to certain "circumstances of evil" that were disturbing" the world at that time?

A fellow soldier once wrote to Major Winters: "You are loved and will never be forgotten by any soldier who ever served under you. I would follow you into hell."

Hell is what Winters witnessed at the Dachau concentration camp in 1945. I was on my way to tour Dachau in 1972 when, overcome by thoughts of its inhumanity, I could not continue the drive, so made a U-turn back to decency and civility. This was Dick Winters' description of that horror:

"The memory of starved, dazed men who dropped their eyes and heads when we looked at them through the chain link fence, in the same manner that a beaten, mistreated dog would cringe, leaves feelings that...will not be forgotten. The impact of seeing those people behind that fence left me saying only to myself: "Now I know why I am here!"

Evil circumstances, sometimes rooted in the free will of human beings, may temporarily counter God's ideal purposes, but God's intentions will ultimately be realized, and often with our help.

Those of you who were present last Sunday recall that Weatherhead tracks Jesus' life and death in the context of these questions:

It was not God's intention that Jesus would be crucified.

It was God's intention that Jesus would have people follow him, not kill him.

However, given the circumstances of evil, Christ not only accepted the Will of God. He truly took hold of the situation, in complete trust of God.

The Cross is not just a symbol of capital punishment, but of the triumphant USE of evil in the cause of the holy, ideal purposes of God.

Weatherhead again: "By doing the circumstantial will of God, we open the way to God's ultimate triumph with no loss of anything of value to ourselves."

Sometimes the will of God needs our help!

During conversation with a beloved, elderly member of a church I formerly served, I was asked if I happened to have known a certain United Church of Christ minister. By his description, I knew immediately that he was asking about my friend Harold Wilke.

No one ever just "met" Harold Wilke. You "experienced" Harold Wilke, who was born without arms, yet lived a full life with that disability. He was the father of two of my high school classmates. The Wilke family and mine were often together in our homes, at school functions, at church meetings. Without the benefit of arms and hands, but with ingenious use of head, shoulders, torso, legs, feet, and toes, Harold Wilke independently dressed himself, ate meals in public, drove a car, traveled world wide as a servant of the Church...all while raising a family as a devoted father, with an equally devoted wife.

When Harold was just a toddler, his mother was hosting other women for a bible study in their home. His challenge in accomplishing tasks for himself, without his mother's assistance, was more than a little unsettling to the guests, and one of them finally exclaimed: "Why are you not helping your son?!" To which Mrs. Wilke responded with absolute confidence: "I am!"

When the Americans with Disabilities Act became federal law in 1990, Harold Wilke sat prominently with President George Bush at the White House, and signed the legislation that he had advocated and helped to advance, holding the pen between his toes.

Evil circumstances—disaster...death...disappointment...disability—sometimes the consequence of natural causes in the scheme of life, and sometimes rooted in the free will of human beings—may temporarily counter God’s ideal purposes. But God’s intentions will ultimately be realized...often with our help.

Consider Major Dick Winters.

Consider Harold Wilke.

Consider Harold Wilke’s mother.

Consider Congresswoman Gabby Giffords.

Consider Senator John McCain.

Consider a present setback in your own life.

Consider Hyattstown Christian Church.

Consider Matthew 7:21: Not everyone who says to me “Lord, Lord” will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only the one who does the will of God...

Consider Ephesians 5:17: Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of God is...

The tragic loss of life in Charleston, South Carolina, or Parkland, Florida, or Las Vegas, Nevada, or Sandy Hook, Connecticut, and the enormous suffering associated with such events, causes us to wonder about God’s role in the very world which God created.

My dentist's philosophy—"If it's going to happen, it's going to happen!"---seems cavalier on such occasions...dismissive...wholly inadequate.

Challenging natural disasters, debilitating human conditions, evil actions may at times temporarily frustrate God's intentional will.

But we must not conclude that every disaster or death or disappointment or disability is intended by God, for that would not be consistent with the loving, caring God who created us, and who wishes only what is good for us.

Such disasters, conditions, or actions, whether rooted in the whims of planet earth, or the vagaries of natural life, or the free will of human beings, may temporarily counter God's ideal purposes, but God's intentions will ultimately emerge and be realized, and often with our help.