



## LAKESIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY

**GOD'S WILL AT THE TABLE**

**1 Corinthians 11:23-33**

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*"So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together."* (1 Corinthians 11:33 NIV)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *Ethics*, makes an interesting observation: "The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil produced the ability to choose our own *GOOD* and our own *EVIL*."

Both of these *choices* and our *pride* can take us an equal distance from God. "I'll decide what's *good* for me and I'll decide what's *evil* for me." *However, there is a third alternative ... GOD'S WILL.*



There is a movie we all love. It is one of my favorites of all time, *The Sound of Music*. There's a moment in the film when Mother Superior asks Maria, "What is the most important thing you have learned at the abbey?" *Maria humbly answers, "To find God's will ... and do it."*

Many of us have been in church for decades. We've got the routine down rather well. We know the *teachings*, we know what we *believe* and *we've decided* what is *GOOD* and what is *EVIL*. Now the other part of all this is, you and I know it's also true that we are a *tough sell*. To *DO* God's will, might mean we have to rethink what we call *GOOD* and what we call *EVIL*. And *we don't like* that kind of challenge. We're a *tough sell* ... to really make changes that God would desire in our lives. *However, can we say with Maria, "My ONE focus ... my ONE task in living ... is to FIND God's will ... and DO it."*



Let me take some time to remind you of a bit of Mark's gospel. It paints a picture of Jesus and how he's responded to by his contemporaries, which is very enlightening. You can read all of this for yourselves later in the first five chapters where things get off to a great start. There's the baptism, the calling of the disciples, Jesus heals a paraplegic, throws out an evil spirit, chooses disciples, calms the storm, heals a demon possessed man and brings a little girl from death to life. *All is well.*

But then, comes the first six verses of chapter 6. Jesus and the disciples go to his hometown, Nazareth. It was the Sabbath and he went and began to teach in the synagogue. Almost immediately, Scripture uses the word "*offense*". They *challenged* him. There he is in *their* synagogue, preaching to *them* about doing God's will and *they* take *offense*! (Mark 6:3) These are his hometown folk ... his homey's ... and they don't like what they're hearing! They *know* their traditions and their *beliefs*. They are *not about to listen* to a message that contradicts every thing they've learned and followed for years! Especially from someone they know ... the guy has brothers and sisters who are still around ... he grew up right down the street in their community ... and now, here he is *trying to challenge them* about what they need to *DO* in order to truly be God's people ... *and they take "offense."*

They even go as far as to say, "*Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?*" (Mark 6:3) In Jewish culture that's an *insult* ... quite the *slur*. Back in those days, the only reason to identify someone by his *mother* was because no one knew for sure who his *father* was. They said, "*Isn't this Mary's son?*" The question, by implication, called Jesus illegitimate ... both as a *prophet* and by *birth*.

It's true, isn't it? We can have some of our greatest times with relatives, but also, there can be times of some pretty deep hurt. Jesus shows *his* hurt with his statement: "*Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house, is a prophet without honor.*" (Mark 6:4)

They pulled the “welcome mat” right out from under him! This is his hometown! They strongly suggested that he *pack up and go somewhere else* with his message. Unwelcomed! And they were so familiar with Jesus ... *they took offense. “Who is this Jesus to imply WE are not doing God’s will?”*

Those of us that have been in the church for years often throw out the “*un-welcome mat*” when anyone challenges what we’ve decided is good and what we’ve decided is evil.

*But, as I stated before ... there is a third alternative ... to DO God’s will.*



There’s a problem that ALL of us in the church need to face. CAN we become so familiar with God that we assume that God agrees with all of our views? Are we so familiar with God, that we just say the Lord’s Prayer without thinking? Are we so familiar with God, that we assume others need to make changes ... but we’ve already made all the changes necessary in our own lives? We know what’s good and we know what’s evil ... Hey, God is going to agree with us on this one.

Jesus gave a challenge to his hometown friends and they took offense ... the religious leaders and his immediate family. Those who *should have been* the most faithful and supportive ... got all offended and told him he *wasn’t welcome*.

This hometown crowd had no expectations ... they were SET in their WAYS. NO excitement about the possibility of change. NO sense of hope for a new future. There was a general consensus that what we’ve done in the PAST ... is what we’ll do in the FUTURE. And, if you’re unwilling to support our past, then you might as well hit the road, Jack!

With no expectation from his hometown and his relatives, Mark records these words: “Jesus could do no deed of power there (no miracles).” (Mark 6:5)

Isn’t that sad? The very people he’s the closest to ... the people who said they loved him ... the church leaders who said they were seeking to do God’s will ... got all tangled up in their own pride. “We know what’s RIGHT. We know what’s WRONG. And we choose NOT to hear anything about God’s will from YOU.”



Somebody sent me a cute story a few of weeks ago ... you know, email. Some of the stuff you get is pretty worthless, but this one was okay.

A Married couple, Mike and Joan, were having problems at home and were giving each other “the silent treatment”. (Has anybody here ever been on the wrong end of “the silent treatment”?)

Well, being a very deep sleeper, Mike realized that he would need his wife to wake him up at 5:00 a.m. the next morning for an early drive with some pals to go golfing. Not wanting to be the first to break the silence, “and so loose the war” ... he wrote on a piece of paper, “Joan, please wake me up at 5:00 a.m.”

The next morning Mike woke up only to discover it was 9:00 and that his friends had left for the golf course without him. Furious ... he was about to go and see WHY his wife hadn’t got him up, when he noticed a piece of paper on the nightstand by the bed. On the paper was written: “Mike, oh Mike. It’s 5:00. Wake up.”

Yep ... The very people Jesus was the closest to ... the people who had said they loved him ... the church leaders who said they were seeking to do God’s will ... got all tangled up in their own pride. No expectations ... No desire to change or need any kind of change in their lifestyle. They gave Jesus “the silent treatment”.

Mark closes with another statement that is filled with pain and sadness. Jesus leaves his hometown and, in Mark’s gospel, he never goes back ... he never teaches in the synagogue in Nazareth again. And as he’s leaving, Mark says, “And Jesus was amazed at their unbelief.”

Maybe we could define “unbelief” as a constant drift into nostalgia. Nostalgia implies we’re always looking backwards not forwards. Unbelief is looking backwards. *Belief in God’s will, is looking forward with an expectation that something new and different will happen today.*



Nostalgia just kind of jerks at the roots of our lives, doesn’t it?

So often you hear people say, “We used to be able to leave our doors unlocked.” “We used to be able to walk the streets without fear.” “There used to be a time when people were respectful.” *Be careful.* If you want to go back ... you’ve got to take the *whole* trip – not just *little* parts of it. Back in the past the infant mortality rate was higher. The average lifespan was 20 years less than today. Many of us wouldn’t be here if the nostalgic memories we have didn’t change and progress didn’t happen.

I think an over concern for *nostalgia* and *memory trips* can often be one way to fail to look *forward in faith* ... *NOT* believing that God is here and doing a *NEW* and *EXCITING* thing in our midst. Nostalgia makes the assumption that the best has already past ... and this leads to “unbelief.” But faith ... believing that God is here ... leads us to expectation ... looking into the future saying, “*O God, let me find your will and DO it.*”



So today is *World Communion Sunday*. What is *God’s will* for *YOU* and for *ME* as we come to the table? What do we *bring* to this table? In the context of the sermon let me make three suggestions:

1. The passage of scripture we read today in 1 Corinthians is the classic passage as we prepare for communion. The *New International Version* says in verse 33: “*So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together.*” So ... *Bring a welcome mat.* Realize that it’s God’s will for us to gather around this table with Christians throughout the world ... from all nationalities and races ... some we agree with and some with whom we disagree. But, the *welcome mat* goes out to *ALL* and it’s not for us to decide *who’s right* and *who’s wrong*. The *welcome mat* is given by God and if we are to do God’s will, we will welcome *ALL* those who are at the table with us. *No rejection* here. *AND ... the welcome mat is extended to God, to come anew, into each of our lives.*
2. God’s will is for us to come with expectations of *miracles*. When our spirits are *dead* ... there will be *no miracles*. But with expectations of God’s *exciting presence*, miracles can happen today in *YOUR life* and *MINE*.
3. Enjoy nostalgia in the memories of written materials, history books and photographs. But life is *not* lived in the land of nostalgia. As you come to this table today, come with *FAITH* ... *BELIEVE* that God is out in the *future* calling us into something new. Through the life of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit in each of our lives, we have learned that God is still in the business of creating and still bringing newness into *YOUR life* and into *MINE*.

This morning let’s throw aside the idea that *WE* know what is *GOOD* and what is *EVIL*. With Maria, as she discovered at the abbey, let’s forget about our will ... “*find GOD’S will ... and DO it*” ... and let it begin right here at this table.

It is *World Communion Sunday!*

Praise be to God!

Amen and Amen.