

McCabe United Methodist Church
How Do We Make Sense of God's Will (part 3)
God! I Can't Hear You!
Colossians 1:9-10 * Matthew 28:16-20: January 12 & 13, 2013
Pastor Rick Fossum

A farmer was working in his fields one day and he was praying, **"Lord, what is your will for my life? What plans do you have for me? Please, tell me."**

He happened to look up to the sky and saw two large clouds and they were forming what looked like letters. He continued to watch the clouds and soon he realized that the letters were P.C. He thought about this for a few minutes. He realized that this might be the answer to his prayer. **"P.C., he thought, "P.C." And then it hit him. "Of course, P.C.. God wants me to Preach Christ!"**

He felt a thrill go through his bones. At last, a clear sign from God. **"God wants me to be a pastor or an evangelist."**

He left his farming equipment in the field and announced to his family and friends that he had been called to be a preacher. Hallelujah! He went to every church that would have him and preached and preached. But, it didn't take long for him to realize that his messages were . . . shall we say, horrible. His ministry not fruitful. He was miserable. About a year later, he returned to his farm. His friends asked him, **"What happened? We thought God had called you to be a preacher."**

"Yeah," he said, "I thought so to, but then I realized that P.C. didn't mean 'Preach Christ'; it meant, 'Plant Corn!'"

Figuring out God's will isn't easy. Have you ever tried to discern God's will for your life? Like the farmer, have you ever prayed, **"Lord, what's your plan for my life? Show me. Please."**

Some people believe that God has a complete and perfect and all-written out plan for their lives filed away in some big cabinet. Their only job is to let this plan unfold. Everything they do, everything that happens to them, every decision they make is already written down.

There's an old cartoon that shows a man being hit by a falling piano. He gets up, brushes off his clothes and he says, **"Well, I'm glad that's over with."** Everything that happens is a part of God's big plan.

The problem with this kind of thinking is this: If everything happens according to God's predetermined, preordained and prescribed plan, then God is ultimately responsible for everything that happens in the world. All the world's torture, rape, genocide, and injustice is on God. You name the crime or the tragedy or the catastrophe and it's on God.

For me, this doesn't make any sense especially if you believe that God is a God of mercy, love and grace.

There's another problem with thinking that God has everything all planned out. It reduces us to nothing more than being merely actors in a play that God has already written. If everything we do is already predetermined; if everything that happens to us and every decision we make is already scripted by God, then, what's the purpose of your life and mine?

Suppose God does have a predetermined plan for your life. Everything you do and everything

that happens to you is all predetermined or prescribed. Let's say, you don't hear so well. You have hearing problems. One day, you hear God calling you to go to college at NDSU. It's part of God's plan. But because you don't hear so well and you think God said, 'UND'. So, you go to UND. And then, let's say that God's plan for your life included meeting *Miss Right* at NDSU, but since you went to UND, you met *Miss Runner-up* instead, married her and had children. Do you see how messy this can get? And then, if you have children who weren't in God's original script because you went to UND and then they have children . . . well, it gets complicated, doesn't it?

So what is it? Does God have a concrete plan for your life and mine? Is everything all planned out from where we go to school, to whom we marry, and to where we live? Or not?

In Romans 12, Paul tells us "*Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is . . . what is good and pleasing and mature.*"

You and I have some figuring out to do, don't we? I believe that God has an outline for our lives. I also believe that God has given us the freedom to write our own stories. God wants us to be kind and loving, just and fair, faithful and forgiving. But, how we get there . . . if we get there . . . is up to us. God has given us the freedom to write our own stories which might or might not include God. Again, it's up to us. It's our choice.

Nancy and I have three children. We have two daughters and one son. They're adults now. We, along with God, are responsible for their birth. Our children have our DNA and our personality traits.

Like most parents, we have hopes and dreams for our children. You might say, we even have plans for them. Our plan is that they have faith in Jesus Christ, that they learn to love others, and they are people of integrity and character. We want them to make a difference in the world using their God-given gifts and talents. We also hope they have joy and happiness in their lives and good friends.

This is our will for them. These are our plans for them. However, as all parents know, we can't live their lives. We can't decide whom they will marry, or where they will live, or what career they will have. Even the things that are most important to Nancy and me . . . things like faith in Jesus Christ and trust in God and love of neighbors . . . we can't force them to do. And we wouldn't want it any other way.

Hopefully, we've given our children the tools they need to make wise decisions. Hopefully, we've helped shape their morals and values and given them certain principles to live by.

But now, as adults, the rest of their lives are up to them.

As you might expect, they've already they made many decisions that Nancy and I celebrate. We're so proud of them. And, it's also true, they've broken our hearts a few times. When asked, we continue to offer our advice. We try to help them when they need help and we will always . . . always love them.

I believe that God is like our heavenly mom or dad. God's will isn't about us taking this job or that job or marrying this person or that person. But rather, God's will is about how we make our decisions. It's about how we live our lives. Are we loving, kind and forgiving? Do we care about our

neighbors . . . those we know and those we don't? Do we talk to God and ask God for advice, for wisdom before we make our choices? Do we make our decisions using the tools God has given us? Or not?

At a church I once served, I was home getting ready to eat dinner with my family. I kept hearing this voice telling me to go visit Dorothy. I really didn't want to. We were ready to eat, but this voice was insistent. **"Go on Rick. Go now. See Dorothy."**

Finally, I told Nancy I'd be right back. Dorothy didn't live far from us. When I got to her house, her doors were all open, but she didn't answer my knock. I heard her car running in the garage and right away I sensed what she was doing. She had the garage door closed, her car was running and she had run a vacuum hose leading from the exhaust pipe to the inside of her car. She wanted to take her life.

I opened the garage door, called 911 and helped her out of the car. Dorothy survived. I haven't seen her or heard from her in years and I hope she is doing well. But what if . . . what if I didn't listen to that voice? What if I had ignored it? Did I have a choice?

You can believe that God had it all figured out. That I didn't have a choice in the matter. Or, you can believe, as I do, that God spoke to me and I had the freedom to either say 'yes' or 'no'.

I'm sure many of you have your own stories about times when you heard that small, still, quiet voice of God telling you to do something or to go somewhere. Did you listen? Did you follow that voice? It was up to you, wasn't it?

I believe God has an outline for our lives. I believe God wants us to love others, to be faithful, to help build a better kingdom of God here on earth. But how we do that is . . . how we do these things is up to us.

Paul tells us in Colossians,

For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.
-Col 1:9-10 (NRSV)

Our purpose, according to Paul, or God's purpose for our lives is this: that we might **"live lives that are worthy of the Lord"** and that we might **"grow in the "knowledge of God."**

Look, I don't think it matters to God one, little bit whether we go to NDSU or UND or any other place. I do believe that God cares about the journey. About how we get from here to there.

Your story and mine are not complete. The remaining chapters are yet to be written. As we write our stories, I hope and pray that we will begin to understand the will of God which, I believe, is this: **"to lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him and to bear fruit in everything we do as we grow in the knowledge of God."**

-Colossians 1:10