

McCabe United Methodist Church
How Do We Make Sense of God's Will (part 4)
God Prevails . . . Always!
Proverbs 31:8-9 (787) * Luke 10:29-37 : January 19 & 20, 2013
Pastor Rick Fossum

This is the fourth and final message in a series Ray and I are calling "*Making Sense of God's Will*." I hope this series (all of our messages) has been meaningful to you. I hope it's challenged you and challenged your thinking about God and God's will.

Last week, we talked about how some people believe that everything happens for a reason. Whatever happens must be the will of God. Whom we marry, what career we chose, where we live are all part of God's plan. This is what I believed for a long time. We were simply actors, acting out the play that God had already written.

Often, I still hear people say, "**Well, I miss my husband (or my wife) a lot. But it was God's will. For some reason, God took him. Maybe one day I'll find out the why.**"

I see things differently now. Life, your life and my life, is like a story that's being written day by day. We're not writing our stories alone. God is writing them with us. God is helping us fill in the pages. How we make our decisions . . . how we live our lives are important to God.

Every day, I pray for my three kids. I told you about them last week. Like most parents, I worry about them. But when I pray for them I find a sense of peace. My peace doesn't come from believing that my prayers will somehow shelter them from harm. I know better. I've officiated at enough funerals for young people to know that bad things can happen to anyone, anywhere, anytime. My peace comes from knowing that God is with them even if . . . even if something terrible should happen. I know God will be with them, holding them, helping them and sustaining them.

A lot of times God uses other people to do the holding, helping and sustaining. Have you noticed that? My son had an electrical accident in July of 2010. A lot of you still ask me about him. I noticed during this time, that many people came to his aid. His sisters were there to support him. His friends visited him and encouraged him. Many of you prayed for him. The doctors and nurses were amazing as they did the work.

Was God with my son? Yes. Definitely yes! In the shape and form of other people, God was there. God was always there.

This is God's pattern. This is God's plan. God uses people.

In the Old Testament, there's a law called "*the Law of Moses.*" God commanded that farmers were to leave the edges of their crops unharvested so the poor could have something to eat. God could have dropped some manna from heaven. God did it once before for Moses, but instead God told the farmers to help. Again, God uses people.

In Proverbs, God calls people to **"Speak out for those who cannot speak. Speak out for those who are destitute. Speak out and defend the rights of the poor and needy."**

God doesn't wave some magic wand and abracadabra rights all the wrongs in the world or cures all the pain and suffering. It would be nice if God worked like that, but instead God uses us to help out.

I need two volunteers today. We're going to talk about *The parable of the Good Samaritan*. This is the perfect story to see God in action. We have a victim, two robbers, two religious people and one Samaritan.

The parable begins like this: A Jewish man was walking from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers robbed him, stripped, beaten and left for dead. Two Jewish religious people walked by and ignored the victim. But a Samaritan . . . Remember, Samaritans were a race of people the Jews despised and they despised the Jews . . . a Samaritan walked by, saw the victim, helped him, brought him to safety, paid for the victim's expenses from his own pocket and promised to return if more help was needed.

"You tell me," Jesus asked, **"who was the neighbor to the man who was robbed? The two religious people who ignored him? Or the Samaritan?"**

This parable is full of great questions. First, you need to ask yourself, did the man get robbed because it was part of God's will or God's plan? Or, did he get robbed because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time and the robbers were just plain bad people?

Second, where did the Good Samaritan come from? Why did he stop and help? Do you suppose he might have heard a whisper that day from God telling him to do something? **"Go on, get off your donkey and help the man. Do something."** Have you ever heard a whisper like that? Has God ever told you to help someone else?

This is what I'm talking about today. God is with us . . . always. Sometimes, it's through other people and sometimes God works alone.

Finally, there's the victim himself. How many times have you been caught in one of life's many dramas? Someone you love dies and it hurts real bad. Or, you lose your job and you're devastated. Or, you get sick or you have an accident or . . . or one of a hundred other bad things happens to you and you find yourself laying on some road just like the man who was robbed and you ask yourself, "**now what? What do I do? Where does my help come from?**" Have you ever been there?

And then a Good Samaritan or someone you know stops and helps you. They offer you the hand of God and you take it.

In the midst of our pain and suffering, God is with us. God isn't causing the pain and suffering, but God is there to help us get through it. And you and I are the tools God often uses.

God has a way of turning our darkness into light; and our despair into hope.

Emmett Till was a fourteen year old youth from Chicago. He had a profound impact on civil rights in the United States. Emmett Till was an African American. One summer Emmett was visiting family in Mississippi. It was the summer of 1955. He was with some friends one day when he did something he shouldn't have done. He whistled at a white woman. Three nights later several men showed up at his uncle's house where Emmett was staying. It was in the middle of the night. They took him, beat him, shot him and dumped his body in the river.

Emmett's mother insisted on having an open-casket funeral because she wanted the world to see the ugly face of racism. The picture of Emmett's body was printed in the newspapers and magazines across the country. As a result, millions of Americans who had quietly accepted the status quo were moved to support the civil rights movement.

This is God. This is how God works. God takes our pain and grief and transforms it into something better.

A long time ago, some religious men didn't like Jesus. They didn't like what he was doing. They didn't like the message he was preaching. They didn't like how he was upsetting the status quo. And so, like Emmett Till, they hung him on a cross and killed him.

They thought to themselves, "**There. That's the end of him.**"

But they wrong, weren't they? They didn't know God. They didn't know how God works.

Jesus's death wasn't the end. It was just a new beginning. God used his suffering and death for the redemption of the world. Through the cross, God brought salvation to all who believe.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was God's shout to the world that good triumphs over evil, that the forces of light will defeat the forces of darkness.

This is God and this is how God works. God takes our pain and grief, and turns them into something better . . . much better. And God does it through folks like you and me.

Years ago, the Salvation Army was holding an international convention. Their founder, Gen. William Booth, couldn't attend because he was sick. Instead, he sent the convention a message he had prepared. The message was one word: **"OTHERS."**

This is God's message to us. God's plan is about others. Helping others, supporting others, encouraging others and loving others. We are the ones that help God turn darkness into light, and despair into hope.

Is there someone in your life that needs what you have to offer? Are you hearing God's voice telling you to go somewhere? To do something? To help someone? It's how God works. It is the will of God.