Matthew 26:42
Lent Midweek 2 • March 7, 2007
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church • Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls
The Obedient Son

The Word of the Lord from Matthew 26: "Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, 'O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.'" This is the Word of the Lord.

Nearly three years ago, our youth group attended a Higher Things youth conference, just as we're planning this summer. Conferences run at an exhausting pace between workshops and outings and sessions and worship; and I remember one night of that conference when I was particularly tired as I arrived at the evening vespers service. Singing and active listening are high-energy activities, and I was hardly ready for either one. As the vespers service continued, my mind wandered away—to, of all places, the Garden of Gethsemane. After all, it was there that the disciples—willing in spirit but weak in flesh—fell asleep while Jesus prayed. That night at the conference, I wasn't doing much better.

But whatever the condition of the disciples in Gethsemane, Jesus still prayed. Confronted with His arrest, trial, suffering and cross, He prayed three times essentially the same prayer: "Thy will be done." It was the Father's will that His Son be crucified and damned for the sins of the world. Jesus desired neither the physical suffering nor His Father's judgment and forsaking. But it was His Father's will for our salvation; and so the Son prayed in the Garden, "Thy will be done."

"Thy will be done." We repeat that prayer as part of the Lord's Prayer every time we gather here in worship. Luther's explanation in the Small Catechism shows that this is all good: "The good and gracious will of God is done indeed without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also." How is this done? "When God breaks and hinders every evil counsel and will which would not let us hallow God's name or let His kingdom come, such as the will of the devil, the world, and our flesh; but strengthens and preserves us steadfast in His Word and faith unto our end. This is His good and gracious will." Indeed, it is; but it is difficult for you and me.

Why? Because as Luther mentions in that bit of the Catechism, your own flesh has a will. That's bad enough, but your will is in cahoots with the devil and the world. By nature, you want to choose your own actions, plot your own course, pursue your own happiness. Life should go a certain way, and you naturally want to steer things in that direction. You think you have a good idea of how things should go, but it's not all you doing the thinking. The world is busy bombarding you with all sorts of messages about how your life should be going. The messages may be about companionship, money, sex, power, influence, fitness, freedom, security, health and more: just watch a few hours of TV ads to find out how your life should be going, and what you need to buy in order to make it so. As the world uses materialism and happiness as its tools of seduction, our

society also increasingly argues that God is holding you back from achieving your dreams. It's your life to live, after all. It's up to you—you're the boss, not God. That's the message. To teens, the message is that it's up to you to decide when to become sexually active, not wait for marriage when God says it's okay. To those in the workforce, it's up to you to claw your way to the top at the expense of others, not look out for your neighbor like the Lord demands. To those near the end of life, it's up to you to decide when to end your life with dignity, not honor that sacred gift of God. The world is hard at work to tell you that you're in charge…and then make sure that you do whatever it says is right.

Now, as all this is happening, the devil is at work to use this message for your destruction. His tactics are many, and far too much for you and me. He'll shoot his darts of envy and greed in your direction so that rather than be thankful for the priceless gifts that God has given you—like family, home, salvation, etc., you'll be too occupied with what you don't have. Indeed, many lives have been squandered by those who didn't understand what great things God had done for them, and wanted something more instead.

The evil one will also make use of a theology of glory within your heart and your will—the belief that, because you are the Lord's child, that all should go well for you in this life. Your goals in life may be noble ones—a pious spouse, financial security, a well-deserved retirement. All of these are gifts from God, but we live in a dying, sin-plagued world, and we dare not expect an untroubled life. Furthermore, the Lord's will—His holy, good and perfect will—for you may be vastly different than your own. These gifts may not be in His plans for you; and when a relationship falls apart or a job is unexpectedly lost or retirement plans are quickly devastated, the devil will use these pains to convince you that God is unfair, that His plan is unjust and that yours was much better. You know better, of course, because the Lord's plan for you is one of forgiveness, salvation and eternal life, all for Jesus' sake. You know that; and yet, when such tragedies strike, you will still be tempted to say, "I know such things happen, but they should not happen to me. Not yet. Not now."

The devil has a third trick: he will tempt you to look for the Lord, but in all the wrong places. Many seek to find the Lord's will not in His Word, but in their own hearts and emotions: thus they follow their feelings, believing that this is God's will, when God's will may well mean going against what you feel. Many seek to find the Lord in signs and wonders, saying "Lord, if You show me a sign, then I will follow You. Then I will know what to do." But, dear friends, the Lord has already shown you His signs for you. He has shown you His cross, where He died for you, that you might be sure of salvation. He shows you the font, where He has made you His own—and sanctified everything you do each day. He shows you His Word, where you hear His will—what He commands, what He forbids, what He promises, and what He leaves open for you to do or not do if you wish. He points you to His Supper, where He gives you forgiveness and life. You've probably seen a movie where the hero is looking all over the place for love, when her true love is actually the guy she's worked next to and confided in. Too many Christians treat

the Lord this way, looking for His Word and will everywhere except His means of grace; and yet, that is where He says, “Here I am, for you.”

The tricks work, and the devil and world are far too much for us. It’s been like this for a long time—ever since Adam ignored God’s will in the Garden of Eden and did what he wanted instead. That’s why the Second Adam is in the Garden of Gethsemane, fully submitting to His Father and praying, “Thy will be done”—for you. Because you favor your will and pursuit of happiness over His Word and will, He gives up all things—even His life—and suffers in your place on the cross. Where suffering leads you to question God’s will, He declares His cross to be God’s will and then suffers the worst of judgments in order to deliver you. Where you’re tempted to seek God’s will apart from His Word, the Word made flesh stays true to God’s will so that you might be forgiven—even when that means the cup of suffering, the cross of wrath and the tomb.

So as you ponder our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane tonight, rejoice in this: though your flesh is weak and tired enough like the disciples where you might nod off as the Lord prays, the Lord still prays. He prays and He submits to His Father’s will and goes to the cross. Risen again, He forgives your sins—that is how He breaks and hinders every evil counsel and will which would not let us hallow God’s name or let His kingdom come, such as the will of the devil, the world, and our flesh. That is how He strengthens and preserves us steadfast in His Word and faith unto our end. This is His good and gracious will for you.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen