

## Your Will Be Done

Matthew 1:18-25

Cradock Presbyterian Church

December 16, 2012

Life is full of times when you gotta do what you gotta do. Let me explain. Lots of times, you have to do things you don't want to do – but you know you have to. Or you know you ought to. And because you're YOU – you do them.

Nobody likes to change a diaper! Right? I've done it lots of times. I see lots of mothers and fathers out there. You've all done it. I KNOW there were plenty of times you really didn't want to do it! I mean, you're sitting there at a WONDERFUL dinner, really enjoying yourself – and you hear the baby start crying. I don't have to go any farther. You did it, because making the baby wait would be bad for the baby. You don't want to hurt the baby. You'll just reheat the meal later.

Or you're just *worn out* from all that overtime you've been putting in. You can't wait to hit that recliner – and by the way, this ain't confined to the men! Lots of our ladies work and enjoy recliners! You get through that door, you get those feet up – and you hear a voice, saying, "You ready to go?" Oh yeah – you were supposed to take your kids somewhere this afternoon. You'd give anything to stay in that recliner! But you gave your word; you don't want to let those young ones down, and they can't drive yet. So you go, **because you love.**

Or here's a tougher one. You're trying to decide on a career. You just graduated from High School a couple of years ago, in the top 5% of your class. You've had a couple of years of college now, without declaring a major – thank God for 100-level classes! Now, you've got to decide what you're going to do with your life. You already know that you've got family in business; take the right major, and in a couple of years

you can start making big bucks. But that's not what you want to do. That's not the way you feel yourself being led. You want to go into something like social work, or counseling, or something like that, something that helps people. **You want to give yourself to people**, to helping people. The societal pressure on you to go for the money is huge. The *family* pressure on you to go for the money is even worse. What do you do?

Consider all of these things, and you are in the same place as Joseph. Here was a guy who by all accounts was a good man. He was engaged to Mary, not yet married, but in their society, they were already promised to each other much more tightly than we are when we're engaged. Unlike us, they didn't get intimate until marriage. So Joseph didn't expect any children until a little ways down the road. The text tells us that Mary "was found to be with child *from the Holy Spirit*." I like how the text hastens to add that last part, "with the Holy Spirit." Joseph was in the clear; the next verse begins by telling us that he was a *righteous* man. We make the mistake of putting that with what follows, which we'll get to in a minute. It goes with this part about being with child from the Holy Spirit. You know I've told you many times about what it means to be righteous. Anybody remember? Right. It means to be right in your relationships. When Matthew writes that "Joseph was a righteous man," he might be finishing the thought: Mary was with child by the Holy Spirit, not by Joseph! – because he's righteous, and he wouldn't do that until after they were married.

Then there's the next part. Joseph, Matthew writes, was "unwilling to expose her to public disgrace." Well, now wait a minute. That's actually *not* righteous. Because the Law says that a betrothed woman who gets pregnant has committed adultery, and the

penalty for that is death. If he had been a strict follower of the Law, he would have turned her over to the authorities. But we talked about this when we did the 10 Commandments; the stonings prescribed as the penalty were almost never carried out. Joseph was clear' after turning it over and over in his mind, he had "resolved" to go ahead and dismiss her, send her back to her father's home quietly. Now, understand this: it wasn't out of the question for a man like Joseph, in his day, to go ahead and go through with the marriage and keep the child! We put our thinking on this one; most of us would consider the betrayal, and we'd *never* want to be with a mate who did that to us. But in those ancient times, having children wasn't guaranteed – just look at Zechariah and Elizabeth, John's parents! No, Joseph wasn't going to do that, either. It's dangerous to psychologize Bible texts, but in this case I think we can safely guess that Joseph's grief and anger at Mary were enough to generate revulsion at the thought of going through with the marriage. No, he'd just end it.

And yet, he was going to do it in such a way that he didn't hurt her. He was going to go through considerable anguish on his part to do it right, with hearings before the priests and all that. He was going to do it because he loved.

God had other ideas. An angel came to him in a dream. No surprise there! You can't resist as well when you're sleeping. And he got the word from God: Go ahead and marry her. Let the world think this is your baby, even if that makes you look like you had relations with her before the marriage happened. In fact, go ahead and name him, which in their law made Joseph his father officially. But name him what I tell you: Jesus, which is a rough transliteration of the Aramaic for "God saves."

Think about it – if Joseph had refused, Jesus' life wouldn't have unfolded as it did. Joseph's actions were a giving of himself to the people of the world, in a very real way. It didn't get any easier. While Jesus was still very young, in diapers, as we might say, God sent a message again: "Pack up and head to Egypt!" You know he didn't want to. They were settled in in Bethlehem with family. So whose will would he follow – his own, or God's? He did as God willed, protecting the infant Jesus from Herod. Joseph raised Jesus in a Godly way. Jesus was ready when the time came for his ministry.

If you fast forward to the end of Jesus' life, you understand how powerful this beginning was. Mary essentially said, "let your will be done." Joseph isn't recorded as saying anything, but his actions speak: he made sure God's will was done, right here at the start. On his last night alive, Jesus knew what awaited him. As he knelt in the Garden of Gethsemane, he not only felt the weight of impending human execution, indeed, grisly, barbaric execution; he also felt the weight, the sting, of the sin of the entire world. He was, in these moments, as human as you or me. He prayed so hard Luke records his sweat as being like drops of blood. "Father, remove this cup from me!" What was the last thing he said, though? "Your will be done."

Well. All right, then. His life was complete. From the very beginning of his life, when people said and did it for him, until the very end, his life was characterized by one thing: "Your will be done." And because that was his life, God's will has been done, and we have been saved. He gave himself to all people. He gave himself because he loved. He still loves, because he's still alive.

You know what that means to us? He's given us an incredible present. He's given us the ability to step up and say to God, "Your will be done." See, we had no choice before. We could only react selfishly, imperfectly, faithlessly before. Now, we've been set free to love people, to give ourselves for people, to give ourselves to God. We've been set free to do the things of God right here on earth. And we've been given eyes to see, not just the things we want to see, but the things God wants us to see.