

We'll begin the sermon this morning by opening up to the Small Catechism in your hymnals, page 324. And you'll want to leave them open as we'll come back to them later on in the sermon. Let's say together the Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." What does this mean? "The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also."

It's an interesting point to ponder, that God's will is done regardless of whether or not we pray for it. Why bother praying then? Yet as we consider our Gospel text for this First Sunday in Advent, we'll see both how good it is that our Lord's will is done apart from relying on us, and also what a blessing it is to us when we recognize His will and desire it to be done among us.

So today we heard of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, riding on the donkey, crowds casting their cloaks on the road and waving palm branches while crying out "Hosanna to the Son of David!" It truly has the appearance of a triumph. And we should note that the triumph is more than just an appearance. This is the coming triumph of God's plan of salvation.

Jesus has come to Jerusalem for His great battle with sin and death. Before the week ends, He will have faced the forces of hell and darkness upon the cross, bearing the awful burden of humanity's sin and wiping it away with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. Jesus is riding into Jerusalem to fulfill the ancient prophecies, the promises of redemption that God had given to man from the moment we fell into sin.

St. Matthew, who loves to emphasize the fulfillment of prophecy in his gospel, points this out for us, noting that Jesus is doing exactly what had been foretold centuries before through the prophet Zechariah. "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" God's grand plan was coming to fulfillment.

And yet interestingly, note what God the Holy Spirit tells us about the fulfillment of this plan. One verse before the actual prophecy we read this: "This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet." Okay, what is "this"? What key event happened to fulfill this centuries-old prophecy? Jesus instructing two of His disciples to go fetch some donkeys. Does that seem like the great working of God, or an everyday errand?

Now to be sure, there are miraculous elements within this errand. Jesus divinely knows exactly where the donkeys will be, and that it will be a donkey and her colt. He also gives His disciples the exact words to speak so that, when someone asks why these two guys are taking their donkeys, they'll hear them and let them go at once.

But if you were one of those disciples on the way to fetch donkeys, would you have considered yourself to be carrying out the divine will of God foretold through prophecy? Or would it have just been a rather mundane errand, perhaps even a slightly confusing one?

Yet note the words of Jesus, specifically the ones He tells His disciples to speak. "The Lord needs them." The Lord, God, the Creator Himself, has need of two donkeys. Could Jesus have

miraculously flown into Jerusalem, or just suddenly appeared there, or even just made two donkeys from nothing, as He did in the beginning? Of course! He's God, and has the power to do whatever He pleases. But in His infinite wisdom, He chose to make these two donkeys, and the two disciples, and the donkey's owners, all part of His plan.

The disciples obediently head into the village, trusting the words of Jesus. And as it turns out, everything is exactly as Jesus foretold. The donkeys are where Jesus said they'd be, and the words Jesus gave them to speak cause the owners to let them take the donkeys. Here we have a great example of the good and gracious will of God being done among His people.

The disciples didn't know what was about to happen, and what Jesus riding these donkeys into Jerusalem would set off – nor did the owners. And if either the disciples or the owners had refused, God's will still would have been accomplished. But they had trusted in the words of Christ, and so the Lord worked through them, blessing them to be His instruments as He brought about His will.

Still today, the Lord God continues to bring about His good and gracious will. Grab your hymnals again and let's look at the next part of the Third Petition. How is God's will done? "God's will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die. This is His good and gracious will."

God's grand plan still continues, whereby He accomplishes great things. Breaking and hindering the plans of evil. Driving back the devil. Exposing the lies of the world. Curbing our flesh's sinful desires. Our God is fighting and conquering darkness on a truly cosmic scale. And as He drives back evil, He also blesses with good. He strengthens us in our faith. He keeps us steadfast in His word. He is our great Captain and King, leading us on to the final glorious victory at the end of the age.

Yet for as awe-inspiring as our Lord's ongoing victory is as He brings about His good and gracious will, it involves many seemingly ordinary events. Yes, there are moments where the grand scale could be seen, such as when Jesus witnesses Satan fall like lightning from heaven, or when the Savior was bearing the weight of the world's sin and the Father has to look away, plunging the whole earth into darkness for three hours, or when Christ victoriously calls out, "It is finished!", and the earth quakes and the temple curtain is torn in half and many holy people emerge from their tombs. Pretty awesome!

But much more often, the Lord's will, His driving back the darkness and shining forth His light, takes place through the more ordinary-appearing things in the lives of His people. As one example, your Lord commands you to be in His word, the Bible. Through abiding in it, you truly are His disciples. Perhaps there are times when you read it and have a light bulb come on as the Holy Spirit shows you something you'd never considered before.

But often you might read the Bible and set it down and not really be sure what the exact benefit was. Maybe you were in the minor prophets and wondering what some of the imagery means, or you

were puzzling over the meaning of one of Jesus' parables, or you were wondering if or how the book of Leviticus still applies today. Like Jesus' command to his disciples concerning the donkeys, maybe you don't fully know what's going on.

But the thing is, God has promised to work through His word. Jesus says that the Scriptures testify to Him, and that His words are spirit and life. The word is the sword of the Spirit, which drives back the devil and cuts through his lies. When you dwell on the word, the Holy Spirit is using that to strengthen your faith, even if you don't understand how He is at that moment.

Or as another example, consider our Lord's command to gather together every week around His word. Maybe to human reason, the command seems excessive, or unnecessary. "People skip church all the time, what's the big deal?" Perhaps the disciples thought along those lines when Jesus sent them for donkeys. "We've walked everywhere up to this point, including all our previous visits to Jerusalem. Why does He need donkeys now?" And yet Jesus had clearly said, "The Lord needs them."

The Lord tells us His Church not to neglect gathering together, even though it was the habit of some. He doesn't tell us this because He's a petty god who just likes making rules and forcing people to follow them, but because He is a loving God who desires what's best for His people. In the same place where He commands us not to neglect gathering, He tells us that we come together to stir up one another to love and good works, and to encourage one another.

When we gather, our Lord uses us to show His love to one another, to encourage and uplift each other – which is so important as the world outside seems to be growing darker and darker. Christ uses fellow Christians to strengthen and keep us firm in His Word and faith.

Like with those two disciples and the owners of the donkeys, God continues to work through people to bring about His good and gracious will, and when we recognize this and participate in it, He blesses us.

This is true outside the church building as well. Stirring up each other to love and good works, encouraging one another, this takes place in our day-to-day lives. Having received God's love, we can show that love to a world whose love is both growing cold and also being twisted into a perversion far removed from actual love.

When we walk in the footsteps of our Lord, keeping His Commandments and doing good works as He defines them, then we show the goodness of God to that world. When we speak the words of our Lord, words of truth, then we are being used to break and hinder the devil's plans and schemes as part of the Lord's will.

We might not think that the word will work or that it doesn't quite make sense, sort of like how telling a donkey's owners that "the Lord needs them" will somehow change their minds. But God's power is present in His word, whether it's coming from His mouth made flesh in Jesus or from the mouths of the people in whom His Spirit dwells.

As you show God's love and truth and goodness to the world around you, you are being used by Him to bring about His holy will. You might wonder how ordinary little actions of Christian living could be part of the grand design of the Almighty. You may not see the results immediately, or at any

point in this life. But just as a seemingly mundane errand was used to fulfill a centuries-old prophecy, your words and actions as Christians are used by God in ways far beyond the scope of any one person.

As our Gospel lesson teaches us, our Lord is constantly at work to bring about His good and gracious will. He works in great and awesome ways; He works in ways so mundane that no one even notices. And everything in between! As Christ's people, we have both the comfort of knowing that God's will is always done and also the blessing that comes when we allow His will to be done among us also. Thus we pray: "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

In the name of Jesus, amen.