

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done

Eight days ago, I wrote to the GP surgery to express my concern about Sue's health, and that she still hadn't been seen by a GP. That lunchtime she saw a GP, then came to the Alpha lunch at church: "Can you fetch the car? I'm to be admitted to hospital." Twenty-four hours later she had a CT scan and then came home. Another 48 hours later we saw the consultant, who told us that Sue has a massive ovarian cyst that needed removing. Currently (day eight) we're awaiting news of an operation date – the medical team meets tomorrow to decide dates.

What was the Alpha session that I missed last week while I was in the hospital? "Does God heal today?" (God has a sense of humour, right?!) So it's not a theoretical question but a very real and practical one. And it's one we touched on in our Alpha group again yesterday.

I shared where I was at, on my journey: No, God doesn't *send* suffering; rather, (1) we have freedom to choose, so we individually bring suffering on ourselves and on other people, (2) this world is subject to decay, and part of that decay is sickness and death – it's a natural process that will continue until Jesus returns to make all things new.

But I know that sometimes God does intervene in that natural process, and I'm struggling with that idea, that he breaks the rules (natural law). I know God does that because I and others around me – and you too, I'm sure – have experienced what we call 'miracles' (whatever that means, and we could discuss it, but not now!) The problem I have is to know when, where, why God should/would work miracles. And the immediate outworking is how should I (we) be praying for Sue?

I'm writing this because I think the Lord's prayer might help, but first back to general principles: if I've learned nothing else this past two years, it's that God wants **above all else** for us to grow in our loving relationship with him and with each other: the first and second commandment.

To add to that: God is all-powerful, so God can/could do anything. But actually there's something God can't do – force us to love. In love, God has set aside that power and has given us freedom to choose. Very dangerous!

So why did Jesus tell us to pray: Thy kingdom come, thy will be done?

If something is 'God's will' then surely it's going to happen, and we can't stop it, right? God is all-powerful, right? Actually, no, I don't think that is right.

As Bishop Desmond Tutu said: "For whatever reason, since humankind showed up on the scene God does nothing without a human partner." So maybe – and here I'm just edging forward tentatively – maybe God only does miracles when we cooperate with him, when we pray and then we actually do something?

I've certainly been struggling for years with the question, "What's the point of praying?" So maybe I'm heading in the direction of some sort of answer: 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done'. But how do I apply that at crack of dawn on 16th Jan 2019 to the presenting problem that Sue's ill and needs healing; how do I pray? how do **we** pray? What are we asking/expecting God to do? We've already seen miracles of coincidence as the process of diagnosis has moved at

incredible speed, against all the odds. But what next? Miraculously take the cyst away? God could do that!

Well, God **could** do that, of course, but what I'm trying to do is to discern God's 'thy will', and to get behind that. I'll tell you, as I told God between 3.30 and 4.30 this morning, what I'd like, please: It would be brilliant if, when I see the consultant after the operation, he said something like, "Interestingly, although the CT scan showed that the cyst was about 9kg, by the time we took it out, it only weighed 4kg!"

I want that for good reasons (I think! but human motivation is a slippery fish!): I want people to be encouraged by seeing something miraculous. But then what about the two folks at St Ed's who are facing operations for cancer, and the young Mum who often sits in front of us at church who has been debilitated by having over 100 migraines since August? And there are others struggling with ill health.

What's the **important** thing here?! The important thing is relationships, not physical healing. How is Sue's illness and my/our reaction to it and/or any miraculous healing going to enrich my/our relationships?

Can I take you back into my Alpha group discussion yesterday. We've talked a lot about our journeying together over the past 2/3 months and I asked them how their journeys were going. One lady with an atheistic husband said, "I think I'm becoming more patient." Now that is **brilliant**; I'm really excited about that! God is clearly at work in that lady, and in the relationship with her husband. I can pray with confidence ('thy will be done'), that her husband will recognise her increased love and patience, and that he will realise that the god he **doesn't** believe in is different from the God his wife believes in. (Actually, the god he doesn't believe in may well be the same wrathful god that I no longer believe in!)

Please continue to pray for me and for Sue – and for yourselves and the people around you. Here's one thing you can pray that I absolutely **know** is 'thy will': In any and every situation that you, I or we, face, please may we grow in love, joy, peace, **patience**, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control? What a **massive** impact that would have if that fruit grew in us! And I know it's also God's will that we grow in the use and exercise of his spiritual gifts (and of our natural gifts too, of course, like writing macros!) so that God's kingdom can grow, i.e. our relationship can grow, here and around the world.

The prospect of seeing how God will answer our prayers is exciting, very exciting, so do let's continue to "encourage one another" and continue to pray God's kingdom and his will into all the situations around us.

Paul Bev. 16.1.18