

“The Four Scariest Words” Matthew 6:7-15

Sermon by Jan Edmiston
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Note: I preached a sermon with this title a few years ago, but with this Halloween falling on a Sunday and with the national elections so near, the opportunity to address “The Four Scariest Words” once again was irresistible.

I have to admit that while I was watching the last game of the World Series last week, sitting there watching the cursed Boston Red Sox actually winning their fourth straight game over the talented St. Louis Cardinals, I had a Twilight Zone moment. “Something is going to happen.” I thought. “This is too simple. Something horrendous is about to occur.”

Maybe the Red Sox would win, but the trophy would be taken away from them. I could imagine the headlines spelling out the Red Sox doom:

***Schilling caught using steroids.
Trot uses corked bat.***

Or worse:

***Sox Win World Series
First Sign of Apocalypse***

It was exhilarating watching them win, but it was also a little scary. Did this signal something dire? Wasn't it a little strange that the Red Sox would break their curse on the night of a lunar eclipse?

And then just last night two bastions of college football – Miami and Florida State – lost to much weaker teams.¹ Scary.

Most of the world knows October 31st to be Halloween – a night of tricks and treats, but in the Christian calendar – at least the ***Protestant*** Christian calendar – October 31st is Reformation Day.

It's the day when – 487 years ago – Martin Luther, a monk and professor in Wittenberg, Germany nailed 95 complaints against his beloved Church on the doors of the Castle Church. To criticize the Church – at least in those days – was *very* scary. To challenge the Pope, to question accepted doctrine – it could get you excommunicated or worse – condemned to hell.

¹ University of North Carolina 31– University of Miami 28. (go Heels)
University of Maryland 20 – Florida State University 17.

But sometimes *choosing the scary thing* is often the only way we can grow in faith. Choosing *the scary thing* is sometimes the only way we can obey God.

The world seems scarier than it used to be. It only takes 3 or 4 words to make our hearts sink and our pulse race.

What are the 4 scariest words you can imagine? Imagine that the phone rings at 2:00 in the morning. It only takes a few words to wake us up with a shock.

*I have bad news.
There's been an accident.
The biopsy was positive.
I want a divorce.*

Or imagine that you are on your way to work, listening to the radio. Or you are home watching the morning news and a special bulletin breaks in. With four simple words, our world stops:

*Suicide bombers strike Starbucks.
Anthrax released in hospital.
Terrorists attack local kindergarten.*

For some people, the four scariest words *this* week might be:

*Bush handily wins Florida. Or . . .
Kerry sweeps Midwest States.*

There is plenty to frighten us, depending on who we are and what we believe. And speaking of belief, the Bible has its share of scary words too:

*And all flesh died. Only Noah was left.²
And God tested Abraham. Take your son, Isaac.³
They struck his head. They spat on him. And they crucified him.⁴*

But these are not the scariest words in the Bible. The four scariest words in the Bible can be found in the passage read this morning.

Jesus spoke these words as he was teaching his disciples on a mountainside. And *we* say these words almost every Sunday morning, although we rarely shudder. We've said them so many times that the shock of these four words has worn off.

The four scariest words in the Bible are these: **Thy will be done.**

² God floods the earth. Genesis 7:21, 23.

³ God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. Genesis 22: 1,2.

⁴ Jesus is tortured and executed. Mark 15:19, 20.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us that God is our heavenly Father and that God is holy. And then Jesus teaches us to pray something rather terrifying, especially for people like us who like to be control of our lives. We are to seek God's kingdom on earth. But the scariest thing is that we are to pray –not for *our* will – but for *God's will* to be done.

When Jesus was praying in a garden hours before his arrest and crucifixion, he asked that he might be spared this horrible fate. But then he prayed words that showed his perfect faith:

Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not my will, but Thy will be done.

Not what *I* want, but what *you* want.⁵ These are shocking words, but they are faithful words.

Once again we will baptize another beautiful child this morning, and once again parents will answer the proscribed questions. Little do we realize how terrifying this whole process is.

The parents are turning over the future of their child to God – **thy will be done.** We as a congregation are entrusting this child to the Lord – **thy will be done.** Whatever he faces in the future, whatever he is excited about, whatever he is worried about, whatever expectations we might place upon him – **God's will be done.** Not *our* will, but *God's* will. This is scary business.

This changes how *we* pray for *ourselves* too. It changes how we think, how we look at the world. Whatever we are facing, whatever we are excited about, whatever we are worried about, whatever expectations we have – if we truly trust God to be loving and wise, consider how different life is when we pray: **Thy will be done.**

Jesus reminds us that God knows what we need even before we ask. This doesn't mean we should stop asking. There is enormous spiritual value in expressing what we want, in asking for our heart's desire in prayer. Maybe *God* already knows, but sometimes *we* don't know *until we put it into words.* Like Jesus, God expects us to spell out what we want, what we deeply need. But like Jesus, our prayers should end, but **thy will be done.**

It's scary to turn our future over to someone else, even to God. But this is where our faith comes in. Do we really believe that God is trustworthy? Do we really believe that God loves us?

⁵ Mark 14:36.

Or is the still, small voice whispering in our ears a voice of doubt and hesitation?

The God who forgives us wants us to forgive others. The God who destroyed death for Jesus can surely rescue us from “the evil one.” But believing all this takes a leap of faith.

Tonight while fairy princesses and Spider Men visit their neighbors in search of M&Ms and Snickers bars, genuine evil lurks in dark corners of the world planning our demise. An election is before us. A war continues. The Red Sox have won the World Series. What in the world will happen next?

We don’t know. But Jesus has asked us to pray a simple prayer together.

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.*

We mustn’t say these words lightly. Because in them we find the most fundamental statements of our faith:

Is Jesus Christ really our Lord and Savior or do we think someone else can save us?

Do we trust in Jesus Christ or do we trust only in ourselves?

In reverence and humility, what is our faithful answer?

Let us pray:

Holy God, we don’t know what will happen in the elections this week. We don’t know what danger lurks for our nation, for our loved ones, for ourselves. But we have to trust that you love us and have a plan that is beyond what we can see or imagine. Grant us pure hearts and the kind of joy that comes from a childlike faith. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.