In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My sermon text for this Sunday is from the Gethsemane scene. I want to lift up Jesus’s words of consent to the will of his heavenly Father. The great passage goes this way:

41And he [Jesus] withdrew from them [the disciples] about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and prayed, 42“Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.” (Luke 22:41-42, RSV)

These are among the most important words in human history. The fate of everything was on the line. Your survival and mine, indeed the survival of everyone, hinged on these words, the consent of Jesus to the will of God. Otherwise, Satan would have destroyed us all.

A couple weeks ago my wife, Carol, and I slipped away for a week and went down to the Eastern Shore of Maryland, to the farm of my sister and her husband. We left Pastor Caleb in charge here at Immanuel, and Lynnae too, and that went great. The week away was a bit of a retreat for Carol and me. I wrote my Easter Sunday sermon down there on the Eastern shore, on the farm.

My sister and her husband have three sons, all living nearby. The three sons are married and each family has five children. So, that’s a total of fifteen grandchildren. They call me Pop Pop. One of the daughters-in-law is pregnant, and so they are starting round six of the children. They all love children.

My kin down there are handy. They are farmers, blacksmiths, carpenters, and farm equipment drivers. They are all really good with tools and engines. There are horses and dogs and barns. Somebody always seems to be building something, and the father and sons sit around and discuss with really precise language what they are building or repairing.

One of my nephews is rebuilding a barn. A couple of the little girls took Carol and me by the hand to show us the barn and the livestock. Six-year-old Elizabeth told us that one of their goats was dying. She led us into a shed, climbed over a fence, and sat down with the dying goat. She lifted the head of the goat and put it in her lap. She gave the goat some water and some food, which the goat seemed happy to receive from her hand. She stroked the head of the goat and comforted it. Then she climbed back over the fence and led us to see something else on the farm.
But as she was leading us, I heard her murmur these words: “Whether the goat lives or dies is up to the will of God. And the will of God is always merciful.” Again, “Whether the goat lives or dies is up to the will of God. And the will of God is always merciful.” She is well-trained by her parents in the faith of the Church, and she believes the faith, without hesitation.

As I was listening to little Elizabeth, I thought to myself, “This is perfect. She is willing to entrust the goat to God, and meanwhile she treats the goat with great kindness.” I don’t think any of us can do better than that.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus consented to the will of God, and the will of God is always merciful. That is what our God wanted: He wanted mercy on our human race. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit were all in agreement with this. They wanted mercy on humanity, even though we, like sheep, have all gone astray and disappointed our Maker in far too many ways.

So, all three Persons of the Holy Trinity desired that we should live. They all desired mercy on us. But One of them died along the way. We believe that the Second Person of the Holy Trinity is “fully God and fully man.” That is, our Jesus is both God and man. And in Gethsemane, this man consented to die. Clearly, it was not easy for him. St. Mark says that he...

...began to be greatly distressed and troubled. 34And he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death;” (Mark 14:33-34, RSV)

Still, he spoke those words we all should cherish in him:

42“Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.” (Luke 22:41-42, RSV)

With that prayer of consent, Jesus headed out to die, and we were given a chance for eternal life.

Do you remember how I said that little Elizabeth comforted that goat? She entrusted the goat to God and meanwhile, she treated the goat with kindness.

So it is in Gethsemane. Soon after our Lord’s consent to the will of his heavenly Father, he turns to a deed of great kindness. He restores the ear of the servant of the high priest. One of his disciples wielded a sword and cut off the man’s ear. A bloody battle could have ensued, but Jesus calms everything down by touching the ear of the man and healing him (Luke 22:50-51). It was our Lord’s last miracle. 1 Jesus consents to drink the cup his heavenly Father wills, and meanwhile he treats the servant with kindness by healing his ear

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and saving people from a battle. It was as if someone having a heart attack manages to lift a child away from oncoming traffic. As long as life remained to him, Jesus continued to do good in this world.

In this story of Gethsemane, Jesus teaches us that it is possible for a human being to consent to the will of God, even though deeply troubled to do so. A man, a woman, a boy, a girl: We are capable of obeying God though our every instinct might be to run away.

You and I are at our best when we live in Jesus. We are living our humanity at fullest stretch when we follow Jesus in trusting the will of God and doing kindness along the way. We reach our heights when we hear the Word of God, say the great words of consent, “not my will, but thine be done,” and press on in kindness to everyone in sight. What Jesus did in his holy passion, his death, and his resurrection, was to save this world so that you and I can inhabit this world in noble ways. He did not save us that we should be lazy and selfish, but rather than we will lend a hand to love, following the example of Jesus, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.