

PENTECOST 8, A, 2020
 SCRIPTURES – Ps. 105; Deut. 7:6-9; Rom. 8:28-39; Matthew 13:44-52

We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. Rom. 8:28-29

When you were in school, did you ever have a kid in your class who knew all the answers? When the teacher asked a question, you knew whose hand would shoot up: “Ooh, I know! I know!” Now: did you ever imagine that that kid... that *irritating* kid... would be you? Did you ever think that God wants you to be that kid?

“We know that for those who love God ...” Paul is including you – the reader and hearer of his letter, his fellow Christian – in what he asserts. **“We know...”** Speak confidently about God! Be a confident Christian! **“We know...”** Yes... but, what do we know? **“We know that for those who love God all things work together for good.”**

I shared those words with Bob Van Orsdel and his family on Thursday. Bob didn't say anything, for he was unaware and unresponsive at that point. Still, I shared them, because Bob's condition is included in those words. When Paul wrote, **“We know that for those who love God all things work together for good,”** he didn't have in mind primarily things that we desire. I mean, who needs to be convinced that things we desire will bring us good?

- In one of my favorite musicals, *Fiddler On The Roof*, Tevye's future son-in-law, the young communist Perchik, says to him, *“Money is the world's curse.”* Tevye says to him, *“May the Lord smite me with it! And may I never recover!”*

Of course we want things we consider to be good to happen to us, and we're glad when they do. What we can be confident of as Christians is that God will cause even what we see as bad – finally, even death – to benefit us. With Paul, we all can, and should, say: **“I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

Paul had many things besides death in mind. For instance, he speaks of opposition from people. He asks: **“If God is for us, who can be against us? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?”** Paul perhaps had in mind charges that had been lodged against the Christians in Rome. You see, years before, on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus' disciples in Jerusalem, they proclaimed to crowds of people – including visitors from Rome, Acts 2:10 tells us – that Jesus was the promised Messiah and the Savior of all people by His death and resurrection. Those Jews from Rome who heard and believed must have shared this message with people in their synagogues when they went back to Rome, for, years later, when Paul wrote to the Romans, he greeted 26 fellow Christians by name. Well, we know from Paul's mission trips what so often happened when the message of Jesus

was proclaimed in synagogues: opposition and strife arose. This probably happened in Rome, for in A.D. 49, several years before Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, the Emperor Claudius ordered all Jews to be expelled from Rome. As followers of a Jewish man, Christians were also considered to be Jews, and so were also expelled. Why did Claudius order this expulsion? Because “the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus,” wrote the Roman historian Suetonius (*Vita Claudius*, 25.4, cited in Romans 1-8, Middendorf, p. 10). Chrestus – Christ – was causing problems! His followers would not join their neighbors in the worship of the Emperor, or in other public religious ceremonies, and so they were viewed as unbelievers and troublers of society.

Have you ever been accused of being a troublemaker because of your faith? Because, for instance, you say with certainty the Bible is true? Or, that salvation is in Jesus alone, and so reject the idea that all religions lead to heaven, or that God will welcome you as long as you’re a decent person? Have you been rebuked for confidently stating that every life matters and is precious to God, including the infant in the womb? If you do more than just go to church but actually live out and speak of your faith in Jesus, you will be accused and spoken against by people. Count on it.

Also expect this: you’ll feel guilty. Did you say the wrong thing? Did you say too much... or, not enough? Guilt easily plagues us. Being sinners, we can easily find sins and mistakes in our actions! A few weeks ago, we heard Paul lament in Romans 7: ***“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.”*** Don’t be surprised when you feel guilty. And, don’t be surprised when others point out your guilt!

To this, Paul says: ***“It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”*** Jesus bore your sin and guilt. In his joy He went and sold all that He had – even His very life – to purchase you as His own. He bore your sins and paid for them, so you are not guilty! He says this, even before His Father in heaven. Know this: what Jesus says matters more than what anyone else says; even your own heart!

And, what about God the Father? What has He done? He ***“predestined [you] be conformed to the image of his Son.”*** Notice: Paul doesn’t say that God predestined you to heaven. Arguments about that are not only a waste of time; they are unscriptural. God predestined – decided long before you were born – that you should be made like Jesus, who was Himself slandered and spoken against. So, don’t be surprised when you are. Rejoice when you suffer with and for Jesus! This is a sign that you are indeed doing God’s will and are pleasing to Him.

God predestined you to this because it is through such things as opposition to your faith that He makes you take your faith more seriously. He makes you to be like Christ. You are His treasure, His precious pearl that by tribulations He polishes and

beautifies. By what you suffer for Christ He makes you unhappy with this world and life and desirous of the life He has prepared for you in heaven; for that great Day when **“the angels will come and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace.”** (Matt. 13) On that Day He we will see that we are **“more than conquerors through Him who loved us”** (Rom. 8).

Especially when you are suffering for Christ, know that in Him we are more than conquerors... now! What does this mean? I would like to illustrate this from our country's history. Our country has done great good; and, seeing as many are now accusing the U.S. of being an unjust and corrupt nation, need to know and proclaim this.

At the end of WW II, we – the United States – were conquerors. We were the greatest power in the world, as with our allies we had brought to unconditional surrender both the Germans and the Japanese. But, what the U.S. did next was truly remarkable: we led the world in helping the Japanese, and the people of Europe, to rebuild.

- Gen. Douglas MacArthur was the primary author of Japan's new constitution, which made it a democratic nation. Many in our military helped Japan rebuild. Jack Kleis, a U.S. Navy diver, led a team of Japanese divers in salvaging sunken ships in Japan's harbors.
- Former Gen. George Marshall authored a plan for the rebuilding of Europe, a plan which was supported by billions of dollars of American money and technology, and the work of many of our people.

We who were conquerors became more than conquerors. We became servants; and so, in a way, saviors.

We Christians have been chosen by God in Christ to be more than conquerors... and certainly more than irritating kids who think they know all the answers. He has given us His truth in His Scriptures and predestined us to be molded into Christ's image that we might be servants and saviors. As you believe and know that **“for those who love God all things work together for good,”** you can be a comfort and strength for those who don't know this and are fearful in times of trouble. As you believe and know that **“neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord,”** you can be a comfort and strength for those who are afraid as they face death.

As Moses told the people of Israel 3,400 years ago, **“You are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession.”** (Deut. 7:6) As His holy people, **“give thanks to the Lord; call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples!”** (Ps. 105:1) In the name of the Triune God, who loves us in Christ forever! Amen.