

+ In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti + Amen.

Text: Romans 8:26

Theme: Help for the Weak



Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

What does the Holy Spirit do in our time of need? “...*the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.*”<sup>1</sup> Many of the prevalent ideologies of our culture tell us we shouldn’t have any weaknesses. And, if in some aspect we are weak, we should appear to be strong. St. Paul is more honest, candid, and realistic. We are not independent from God; we are completely reliant on Him. Unbelievers too, constantly rely on the goodness of God, but they don’t recognize it. Only the final judgment will breach the unwavering denial and rejection that enslaves the ungodly. Lest such claims are thought to be uncharitable, it’s good to remember that souls are at stake. Jesus says today, “*This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous.*”<sup>2</sup>

Christ did not come to merely enhance the conditions and experiences of this temporal life. He came to overthrow the dominion of sin and the supremacy of death. If the mission of the church is not to show “*those living in darkness and the shadow of death*”<sup>3</sup> that Christ is the “*light of the word*”<sup>4</sup>, to save them from eternal damnation, then we’ve badly misunderstood the whole content of the Scriptures. If the purpose of our Christian witness is not to show that many of the things considered strengths in worldly terms are weaknesses in God’s sight, and many of the things society considers wise are foolish in God’s sight, then what are we doing?

If we have the mind of Christ<sup>5</sup> our greatest desire is to see people freed from the guilt and power of sin, protected from Satan’s deceptions, and saved from the eternal threat of hell. What knowledge could we give that is more important? What support can we offer that is a higher priority than looking after the soul? We’re not talking about neglect of peoples’ physical, psychological, and emotional needs. God works holistically, of course. He opens people to receive the gospel through simple acts of kindness. Jesus says, “*If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because He is my disciple...he will certainly not lose his reward.*”<sup>6</sup> But it’s all in service to their eternal well-being.

Christian maturity is measured by increasing dependency on God, not autonomy. In Christ, the weak are strong. Still, it might seem a strange thing to say- as the apostle does here- that we do not know what we ought to pray for? Surely our most honest and heart-felt prayers are offered when we beseech God in time of desperate need? Do we not know exactly what pain

or grief we seek to be relieved of? Indeed, we may. Yet, it is not for us to prescribe what course of action God may deem best for us. So, while it is proper and necessary for Christians to call upon God in prayer at all times and in every circumstance, it is not wise to try and dictate to God how He should address those needs.

Perhaps that's why in his next breath St. Paul ventures this unfathomable truth. "*We know that is all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.*"<sup>7</sup> The exact translation is a little tricky but it doesn't change the fundamental meaning. The misapplication of this verse- it's not our loving of God that triggers His goodness- is not our concern here. Of interest is the mystery of how this could be and the support it gives us in times of doubt.

From our perspective God's accomplishment of this herculean task- this working of His good purposes in all circumstances for the elect- is largely enigmatic and cryptic because the ways of God are inscrutable to us. When we pray "*lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*"<sup>8</sup> we are asking for precisely this blessing. To do so God must use Satan as His lackey causing the devil to unwittingly drive people to the mercy of Christ. The scope of evil, its depth and breadth, the extent to which it penetrates the human mind and heart is beyond our comprehension. Even our own capacity to participate in unrighteousness and the guilt that it accumulates must be accepted- as by faith- as the way things really are. Our sinfulness can be demonstrated to us to some extent, but its true profundity is beyond our grasp. This drives us to repentance.

Yet, the conviction that God has, and can, and will continue to accomplish this mammoth task of *bending towards goodness* should have us brimming over with confidence while keeping us balanced with humility. What do we have that the Father has not given us? What do we lack that the Son cannot supply? What can we risk that the Spirit won't restore?

A man in his mid-forties was searching for meaning. It wasn't a mid-life crisis, *per se*, he wasn't rushing out to buy a Harley or pursuing quick fixes to recover his youth. It was a deeper search than that- more existential-*ish*. He had grown up in a nominally Christian home but his connection with the church soon faded. He became fully immersed in the "rat race" of society. He had a stable family, a wife, three kids and a dog. He lived in the suburbs. His new search for purpose wasn't really a focused quest, either. He was restless but not anxious.

One day he was dining in a restaurant for Sunday lunch. He was unaware the family next to him had just come from church. He overheard the young daughter ask her father, "*Daddy, why didn't anyone help Jesus when He was put on the cross? If I would have been there, I would have helped Him.*" At first he found the exchange quaint. But he couldn't shake the image. Soon the hollowness in his life started to be stirred up by the bravery of her words and the enormity of the misunderstanding in her mind. This virtuous girl would presume to intervene in the most horrific crime in the history of humanity! She would purpose to make intercession for the Intercessor. His search for meaning wasn't quite over but the Spirit now

had a hold of him.

Dear friends, the Intercessor has many ambassadors. Maybe, today, tomorrow, or the next day (or all three), the Spirit is going to be using you as an assistant to His intercession? Maybe your prayer for someone in their weakness is not just a fond thought while having your after dinner cuppa or your bedtime devotion? Maybe it will involve an email or a phone call? Maybe it will require a personal visit, time, resources, or money? Maybe it will demand sacrifice? Maybe it will really inconvenience you? Such ‘maybes’ are not theoretical possibilities, but concrete realities, matters of when, not if. Sharing one another’s burdens is the privilege of Christian fellowship. Epicureans, ancient and modern (you can “google” it), strive to journey through life avoiding pain and seeking pleasure. It’s naturally a very appealing philosophy. Believers, however, suffer alongside others in step with the Suffering Servant, Who truly carries the load.

The eighth chapter of Romans crescendos to a magnificent flourish. St. Paul invites all challengers to the contest. He throws down the gauntlet. He summons all opponents; nay-sayers, gainsayers, skeptics, cynics, scoffers, scorners, ridiculers, scribes, Pharisees, Judaizers, all who query, doubt, question or oppose the claim that eternal certainty, joy and peace are found in the God who took on flesh and was surrendered to crucifixion on behalf of all sinners. The apostle invites all who dare to adjudicate the recompense for spiritual iniquities against God’s people, including Satan Himself, saying, *“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all...It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died- more than that, who was raised to life- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”*<sup>9</sup>

It is into His name that you are baptized. It is His holy body and precious blood that you receive at this altar. In Him you have life, and peace, and hope. And you don’t have to wait to find out if you’ve been accepted into His family. You are already citizens of heaven. Your life has meaning. Yes, believers too can lose the plot. The emptiness creeps in like the shadows on a cold winter’s night. Surely this is one of the weaknesses of which this chapter speaks. But don’t fear. The Spirit won’t let you wander aimlessly in the wilderness indefinitely. Christ has already been to the wilderness. These certainties are irrefutable. And so is our creed, expressed so incomparably to end the chapter, *“I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers; neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*<sup>10</sup> Amen.

+ In nomine Jesu +

Eighth Sunday After Pentecost  
26 July 2020  
Reverend Darrin L. Kohrt

<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:26

<sup>3</sup> Luke 1:79

<sup>5</sup> See 2 Corinthians 2:16

<sup>7</sup> Romans 8:28

<sup>9</sup> Romans 8:31-34

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 13:49

<sup>4</sup> John 8:12

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 10:42

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 6:13

<sup>10</sup> Romans 8:38-39

