

For Good
Rev. Nicole Farley
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
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Romans 8:26-39

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷ And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

²⁸ We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³ Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,

‘For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.’

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ 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.

As you know, our youth and friends spent the last week on a mission trip with me. The group who coordinates our trip, YouthWorks, always builds the week of service around a scriptural theme. The trips this summer are built around the second half of John 10:10: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” The translation they used was “have it to the full.” Our devotionals all week guided us around what this kind of good life might look like, for ourselves and for others, lifting up other verses, too, and what did I find to start off our week? Romans 8:28, a portion of our reading from this morning. “We know

that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose."

I know today you might be wondering how exactly God is working for good. I also know these last three weeks Elizabeth McCord has been talking with you about that process we call discerning, something we all do whether as a church or as individuals or businesses or families. For us as Christians we try to make sure we listen for God's voice as part of our discerning. One of the most helpful pieces of relationship advice I ever read, although I can't remember exactly where, was to, in a difficult moment, ask yourself, "Is it in keeping with this person's character that they would intentionally be trying to hurt me?"¹ For most people we would be hard pressed to answer an honest "yes." With all of the biblical witness as evidence, we certainly couldn't say it is in God's character to intentionally hurt us, indeed it is so far from God's character. A "yes" does not befit the God who came to us as one of us so that we might have life abundant. A "yes" does not befit the God about whom Paul wrote, "He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?"

One night on our trip we were asked to write down on a sticker what we think the good life is and then add it to a sign with the stickers from people in the previous weeks' trips. As I read them, I found a lot that had the message of time with family and friends. There, too, were notes like "knowing God has got this. and hiking" and "wherever / whenever people are kind" and "seeing people help each other." Because we had a 2" diameter circle to write on, we were naturally encouraged to distill our answers, to watch the add-ons and extras evaporate away as we made our sentence or sentences. I suspect you could offer your own answers as well, naming what the good life is to you. I won't ask you to write it down but take a moment now to think about what an answer might be for you. You know what I would guess? I would bet I didn't come up, except maybe in some way for Scott. I'm an add-on, an extra, to the life God has given you to cherish. And I am so grateful to have been led here to be that. I would bet, too, that this beautiful old building probably

¹ I know it was somewhere in John Gottman's *The Seven Principles for Making a Marriage Work* but I just can't recall exactly where. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999)

wasn't in the sweet reduction of your good life. Another add-on, an extra, to the life God has given you to cherish. Your answer is something to hold onto and come back to in discernment.

Paul asks, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" And he answers his own question with "I am convinced 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." The YouthWorks folks pared it down this way: God is good and is for our good.² No changes, no welcomings or farewells, no generous financial gifts or declining pledges, no certainty or uncertainty, nothing present, nothing to come can separate us from the love of God. This is the good news. This is the good life. The good news is that all things work together for good for those who love God. The good life is that all things work together for good for those who love God. For you and for me. Amen and amen.

Let us pray: Thank you, God, for the good, full, abundant life you have shown us through Jesus Christ. Receive our grateful prayers of thanksgiving this day, we pray. Amen.

² YouthWorks "The Good Life" devotional booklet, p.12; published 2017.