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**Pentecost 10, August 6, 2023**

**“God’s Most Troubling Promise”**

**Read: Romans 8: 28 – 30; Memorize: Romans 8: 28 NIV**

Have you ever noticed that life is full of challenges? Some are just routine, everyday headaches. The car breaks down, you’re late for work. It rains on your daughter’s wedding and so on. They may drive you crazy but they’re just passing flights of bad luck, almost nothings.

Sooner or later, all of us face some pretty steep mountains to climb. The death of a loved one. The diagnosis you dreaded. The loss of a job, the breakup of a family, and events such as that. And then we have this verse to deal with: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” I’ve had my struggles with that verse at times.

Part of the problem may be that people misquote it. They say: “All things work together for good to them that love the Lord.” That’s not what the Bible says: it’s God, not things, that work for good to those who love Him.

And even that needs the Lutheran question asked: “What does this mean?” Does it mean that faith is a blanket God tosses over us so nothing bad happens? I only wish we had such a security blanket.

I’m not familiar with this but I’ve read about it. Many years ago, there was a TV show called “Early Edition.” It was set in Chicago. It followed the adventures of a young man named Gary Hobson who mysteriously received a newspaper, The Chicago Sun – Times, each morning. It was peculiar.

First, it was delivered by a cat. Second, mysteriously, it was the newspaper for the next day. It would reveal tragedies that were coming. It was Hobson’s job to keep them from occurring. One day, the headline screamed, “One hundred fifty die as plane crashes on takeoff.” At the bottom of the first page was a story of a little girl, hit by a car, who died on the street, awaiting transport to a hospital.

Determined to prevent the larger catastrophe, he heads for the airport, only to be stymied by Chicago traffic. As he nears an exit, he sees the little girl cycle by and changes his mind. He can't get to the plane, so he'll rescue the girl. Getting off the highway, he's just in time to whisk her into his car and rush her to the hospital, where she is saved.

As he sits dejectedly wishing he could have saved the 150, the doors fly open and girl's parents rush in. The father is dressed in an airline pilot's uniform. He had been pulled from his flight just before takeoff with the news of his daughter's accident. The delay prevents the tragedy of the crash from happening. I might add, and they lived happily ever after because isn't that the way fairy tales end?

Some people think that God's supposed to miraculously help us avoid the sadness and hurts of life. Admittedly, it does happen that way, sometimes. Remember, God is always working for good and that good sometimes happens in that way. But when it doesn't, God is still "working for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose." We may not see or understand it, but it is true.

Christian writer Lyndsay Park Hill shares this insight: "God brings about the good by weaving together our daily decisions." Despite circumstances, "In all things God is working for good for those who love Him?" Does it mean that God magically protects His children from harm? No! You and I know that harm does come to God's children, as well as those who are not. God is not some rabbit's foot.

Does God allow challenges to test us and make us stronger? Yes! If it is true that in all things God is working for our best good, are those difficult circumstances for our good also? Yes!

Pastor and writer Barbara Brown Taylor watched a huge female turtle heave herself up to the beach to dig her nest and lay her eggs. Returning later, she was unsuccessful in finding eggs, but did find the tracks of the turtle.

Unfortunately, rather than heading back to the sea, they were heading into the dunes. It was already blisteringly hot. She found the mother turtle in distress. She got water and some kelp to cover the turtle and went for help. Finding a ranger, they drove back

Sensing the turtle was in dire need, he flipped the turtle over on her back, wrapped tire chains to her front legs and hooked the chains to the trailer hitch. Then he

took off, yanking the turtle's body through the sand. They hauled her to the water's edge, unhooked her and turned her right-side up.

At first, the turtle lay motionless, as the surf lapped at her body. Then the waves began to refresh her. Every fresh wave brought her life back to her until one of them made her light enough to find a foothold and push off, back into the water, that was her home.

So, should we see God as the heavenly ranger, who ties chains around us, dragging us painfully towards the waters of baptism, so that we may find salvation? Is that the explanation for why there are tragedies in our lives, that we might be rescued by God? There are some who see it that way.

There is comfort for some in tragedy, no matter how awful, knowing our loving God is working for good. And much scripture lends itself to that interpretation, especially our verse. But it is not the witness of all of scripture. It is hard to believe that God would cause tragedy to teach us a blessing. I want to make sure you hear that word – cause, because that's part of the problem. As Christians we believe that God permits, not causes, tragedies. What kind of God would cause tragic hurt in the lives of His children?

So, the question becomes, do we just ditch that whole verse and try and explain tragedy on our own? No. So, why did Paul write these words? They are words of encouragement, when we face difficult times. We need to be reassured that God is working in that time.

Let's start with one thing that we have to affirm: we live in a world of natural law. We can count on the law of gravity to keep us from floating into space. At the same time, we also count on the law of gravity to kick in when we step off the roof of a high building. It will pull us painfully, and probably fatally, to the pavement below.

It may be painful to know, but we cannot live one day on the earth if the laws of nature were suspended for even a moment. Many of the tragedies that occur are a simple consequence of that natural order. If you drive 100 mph on your motorcycle and try to negotiate a sharp curve, there is a very high probability that you will hit something. God did not cause that crash, your foolishness did.

Sometimes, tragedies occur because we do dumb things. Sometimes, bad things happen because the laws of nature are broken in ways we don't understand and cannot control. How many deaths occur each year because of defective genes in the human body for which there is no accounting; this does not mean that God or the universe picked us out specifically to be punished.

Jesus dealt with that issue in Luke 13 when He is asked about some tragedies. He replied to the questions about Galileans who were killed by the Romans or those who died in a tower collapse. He asked if it happened because they were worse sinners than others? Then answers, "No." We live in a wonderful, abundant world, but sometimes things happen. Sin has impacted us.

The second thing we want to remember is that our perspective changes how we see things. Our faith helps determine how well we deal with tragic events. And it is really important that we remember this: "God is working for the good of those who love Him . . .". He is working for those He loves. Sometimes, tragedy brings people to him; sometimes it provides a witness.

A pastor went to comfort the family of a nine-year-old, who had been sick for many years. He was sure there would be many questions. He knocked at the door, and as the dad opened it, began to say, "I'm terribly sorry." The father interrupted him, "Thank you, Dick, but don't be. We are sad, of course, but Jean and I are so profoundly grateful that we had Billy for the nine years that we did!" There were no questions, anger or needs to be dealt with.

The pastor explained: "Both of them were standing in another place. You see, they knew God and they knew Him intimately." The God they knew and loved, loved them, which made all the difference in the world to them. They understood that the God they loved would not bring harm to their son. Faith led them to give thanks to God for allowing them to have their son for as long as they did.

A couple had it all, a mansion, children in private schools, cars, vacations and a house on the lake. Life was sweet and money made their world go round. Then it all fell out from under them. A partner embezzled money from their business; it collapsed. In the midst of that, their oldest son was killed in a car accident.

It was a recipe for disaster, but a neighbor invited them to church. Thinking they had nothing to lose, they went. They liked it and came again, and again. They went to Bible study, made genuine friends, who accepted them as they were. The

**kids experienced the same acceptance. This couple's relationship with God grew. They went from believing in God to loving God. They discovered a richness of life that they had never known before.**

**God invites all to believe. You don't have to wait for tragedy to strike to do so. You can love God even when life is going well, because in all things "God works for the good of those who love Him."**

**We live in a lawful universe. Most of the time those laws work for our benefit and we are blessed by them. When you know God, you know you will never be separated from His love.**

**Count me in: How will knowing that God is working for good in all things help you to share the love of Jesus with others?**