

Trinity 11

I take as my text today, from the lesson appointed for Morning Prayer, the 28th verse of the 8th chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable unto thee, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.

In your bulletin, there is an insert with today's Morning Prayer Lesson which I am certain that you have read. It's the basis for my sermon today.

Now, the older I get, and the more time I spend in the pulpit and, most especially the time I spend at the Altar, all the more I reflect upon the *love of God*. As I look around me each day and see the wonder and magnificence of God's **Creation**, even as I look out at each of you, yes, I cannot help but see the **Love of God**. The **Love of God** reflected in all his **Creation**.

Each day, every minute, if we but look around us we cannot fail to see the hand of God. Really, can we ever reflect too often or too much on the love that is God, comes from God, that binds the Holy Trinity, and that binds us to our Heavenly Father? — the **Bond of Love**.

Usually, I take my texts from either the Epistle or Gospel appointed for the particular Sunday, occasionally the Collect; but today, I would like to take a few moments to address the Lesson appointed for Morning Prayer from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans.

In this passage, we find an extraordinary and compelling look at the extent of **God's Love**, presented in terms easy to understand.

Indeed, this particular reading from St. Paul is so powerful that several verses are found in the burial ceremony, giving us who remain behind assurance that nothing can ever separate us from the **Love of God**, that **Divine Love** which binds all of creation to its **Creator**.

Paul's words from verses 38 and 39, which you most certainly may remember, are especially comforting:

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What can be more reassuring than Paul's words that there is no power, no matter how evil it may be, that can separate us from **God's Love**; neither can anything in the present, or even in a future age.

Neither life nor death can separate us from the **Love of God**, for we live *with* and *in* Christ, and in death, dying with him, we also rise with him; thus death only brings us closer to him; death is not a barrier but a transition from one state to another, from life in this world to life in the world to come, life eternal.

Paul uses astrological terms to further emphasize that bond of love we have with God. He draws on people's fear of the time, fear that their lives were dominated by the stars. First, he mentions height, when a star is at its zenith, and its influence is the greatest; then, depth, when a star is at its lowest point, its nadir, and has the least influence.

Here, Paul allays their fear that the stars have power over them, by telling them that there is nothing, not even the stars, nothing can separate them from God's Love.

There is nothing greater than God; nothing greater than his Son, Jesus Christ, through Whom has been revealed the greatness and extent of the **Love of God**. Therefore, we have nothing to fear.

Thus, we can begin to understand what Paul means by his statement:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.

Here, Paul borrows from the Stoics, who believed that it was the Logos of God who kept order in the world, and who ordered the universe; the Logos who was the Mind of God, the Reason who kept the universe from falling into chaos. It was the Logos who had a plan and purpose for every individual, and nothing could happen that did not come from God.

According to the Stoics, there was nothing we could do but accept what God sent our way; to do otherwise would be for naught.

For the Christian, though, there was more — there *is* more.

In Paul's mind, there was a similarity with the Stoics; but the basis for any similarity was this Bond of Love. Whatever comes our way, if we accept it as coming from an all-wise and loving God who knows what is best for us, then we may also be assured through this mutual love, God will not burden us beyond our ability to bear it.

What we may understand as being good for us may not, in the end, actually **be good for us**. At the same time, what we may understand as bad, may in the end be good.

That is why we must love and trust God, trust that he, in his perfect Love, Wisdom, and Power, is always working toward what is best for us.

Toward the beginning of this lesson from Paul's Letter to the Church in Rome, we find words that emphasize the need for us to trust, as well as to love God:

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

These words not only shed light on our need to trust God to know and provide what is best for us, but also address our human frailty in *our* not knowing what is good for us or, really, even knowing what to ask for in prayer.

We are hindered in our prayers by not being able to see the future, not a year from now, not even an hour from now; and we are hindered in our prayers simply because we cannot know what is best for us in the sight of God. So, the prayer that *we* ought to offer is offered for us, instead, by the Holy Spirit.

By this, the Holy Spirit is our advocate aiding us in our prayers and supplications, articulating the deep emotions which cannot be expressed in language.

Deep emotions — those deep emotions which are felt, experienced, and cannot be wrapped in mere words because of our very human frailty and inadequacy.

Regardless of our human inadequacy and frailty, we, through prayer, articulate and establish a line of communication with God; a line by which we open our hearts and minds to him, expressing our love and trust in him; beseeching him on our behalf and others; and telling him our desires, frustrations, fears and pain, and our hopes.

Although others may offer intercessions for us, so we are obligated to offer up our prayers, for God is ever ready to hear from us, and to listen to us. He wants us to come to him in prayer. We are, as his creatures, obligated to offer ourselves **to** him in prayer. And we should remember that prayer is a two-way communication: we need to take time to listen to God, as well as to beseech him. Just be quiet and listen.

Yet, there is more. Let us return to those words from St. Paul with which we began:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

What if we substituted *invited* for *the called*?

Invited — we are invited to the blessings of the **New Covenant** according to God's purpose, proving that all things work for our good on the supposition that we love God.

St. Paul takes for granted that *we Christians* are all called, invited. Think in that term, invited, for indeed, we are invited to God's **Holy Table**, here and now. It is evidenced by our profession and acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, by our very profession of the **Gospel Faith**.

Clearly from the apostolic writings, all who are in the *Visible Church*, professing the Faith, are numbered with those invited to the **Heavenly Banquet**.

Simply put, we are invited to the **Heavenly Banquet** according to God's purpose, as evidenced by our love of God.

By God's Grace, by his Love, and through his Mercy, we are invited to the feast, the **Heavenly Banquet**, and by accepting that invitation, we begin our journey to eternal life.

Thus, embarking on that journey, we may utter this marvelous prayer:

Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. Not my will but thine be done.

This we can pray in certain confidence that all things, through the *binding love* of God, will work together for our good.

Into your hands I commend my spirit — Into your hands —not a resignation but a recognition, a recognition deep within our very being that God, whose very **Nature** is **Love**, will never forsake us. He will not abandon us. He will not abandon any of his **Creation**. But we, above all, who have accepted that **Divine Love**, which is beyond our human comprehension, will be redeemed through the same love that passeth all understanding.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.