

“God Is for Us!”

One of the most difficult periods of time in my life began when both of my parents' conditions had so deteriorated that my siblings and I knew our mother's and father's living arrangements had to change. We moved them to a facility near my home and Round Grove United Church, so they would be able to receive quality care and one of us, myself, would visit them daily and make sure they received appropriate care and lived the best quality of life they could. Unfortunately, the level of their abilities quickly and continually deteriorated.

You may wonder if I expected or demanded my siblings share the responsibilities I assumed. The answer is I asked them to continue managing the long term care insurance coordination and bill paying for our parents. Of course, a major part of my motivation for devoting a significant part of each day to caring for my mother and father was my love for them and my gratitude for all they had done for me.

Another important aspect of why I made and kept the commitment was my Faith Relationship with God. Although I was not then, specifically, remembering the Apostle Paul's words from today's Scripture, they sum up a crucial element of my faith and relationship **with** the Almighty, *“We know that in all things God works for good with those who love Him, those whom He has called according to His purpose.”* I not only trusted God would work for my parents' good, I understood our Divine Parent was calling me to be one of the Almighty's agents through whom that good would be fulfilled. Additionally, in line with that quote, I knew God would work to enable me to carry out the call to minister to my parents and I trusted God would work and was working for my good.

Take a moment now to recall those times when life was very difficult for you. When have you been faced with making a significant commitment of Time, Energy, Money, Trust, and/or Faith, which led you to wonder how you would be able to fulfill that promise? **What or who did you find assuring – comforting – trustworthy – faithful, so you made such a decision with some degree of hope in being able to fulfill it?** I hope, in some of those types of situations, the person or resource you depended on was your **Divine Parent – God!** Perhaps, you trusted in a gift from God or someone, who you believed was an agent of the Almighty, **working to do “good”** for you or for the person or organization you sought to help. If not, then allow me to share with you why I trusted and still believe our **Divine Parent is working for our “good” – is for us!**

I knew, of course, God's working for good with my parents and even myself was not going to result in my mother and father miraculously being restored to good health. **With that being the case, what does God working for good mean?** For me, the question points to the nature of the relationship between the Divine Parent and ourselves. The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Roman's – in today's Reading provides valuable insights into God's relationship with us – how **God is for us.** He wrote, *“In view of all this, what can we say? If God is for us, who can be against us?”*

Paul did not stop with those words but used them to ask questions, which reveal the **Almighty's Self-Giving and Suffering Love for us – “Agape”.** The former enemy of Christ, who was himself transformed to be God's Instrument – Agent, explained who can be against us, writing, *“Certainly not God, Who did not even keep back His Own Son, but offered him for us all! He gave us His Son — will He not also freely give us all things?”* Again, the apostle asked, *“Who will accuse God's chosen people? God Himself declares them not guilty!”* Paul knocked his point out of the ballpark, *“Who, then, will condemn them? Not Christ Jesus, who died, or rather, who was raised to life and is at the right side of God, pleading with Him for us!”*

Asking his basic and repeated question one last time, the apostle revealed **God's “Agape” Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love embodied in God's Son,** saying, *“Who, then, can separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble do it, or hardship or persecution or hunger or poverty or danger or death? No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us!”*

The Apostle Paul did not promise God would magically relieve us of all of those terrible experiences of life. The author of the Letter to the Romans did not claim my parents or I would have smooth sailing, as **I sought to be God's agent of working “good” for my desperately ill parents.** Believe me, there was plenty of trouble, hardship, danger, and finally death but **none of that changed their or my relationship with our Divine Parent.**

Paul boldly made a similar, although much more dramatic declaration, *“For I am certain that nothing can separate us from His love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below — there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

I trust, you and many others here today, can rightly testify how all of the suffering and difficulties you experienced when the Divine Parent worked for your good and/or the good of someone important to you, also demonstrates **God has been and is for you, them, and all who love God!** I am not wearing, nor do I propose you should act like you wear rose colored glasses. God’s work for the good of you and others does not mean you and they have not and will not experience hardship but **none of those situations are able to keep us from God’s Love – “the love of Christ”!**

Having such an experience encourages you and me to trust in the Divine Parent’s and Jesus’ love for us – in the Almighty’s working for our good – in the belief **God is for us!** But, if one has not gone through such an occurrence of experiencing God’s and Christ’s love – regardless of any possible obstacles, how might we be prepared to trust our Divine Parent and the Son of God will be there for us when those times come? Additionally, **how can you or I find enough faith and trust in God’s Love**, if we must face more than one of those situations of being committed to believe God will work for our and others’ good, in the midst of additional extreme difficulties, at the same time?

For me, a crucial part of the answer to those questions was presented in the early verses of today’s Scripture, when Paul declared, *“For we do not know how we ought to pray; the Spirit himself pleads with God for us in groans that words cannot express. And God, Who sees into our hearts, knows what the thought of the Spirit is; because the Spirit pleads with God on behalf of His people and in accordance with His will.”*

Yes, great sources of comfort, encouragement, trust, strength, and guidance are found in God’s Holy Spirit and our Divine Parent’s reception of our prayers! As I lived through those troubling days of helping provide God’s *“good”* for my suffering parents, prayer and the Almighty’s Presence in the Spirit healed and renewed me. When my stresses were compounded by the speedy illness and death of my mother-in-law, Bernice Sprinkle – Margaret’s mother, and when my ministry was under attack and assaulted by those using questionable and deceitful actions, prayer was and still is a great empowerment. Fortunately for me, because I work in this building, I am blessed with frequent access to this Sanctuary – an especially important, meaningful, and sacred place to allow the groans of the Holy Spirit to help me in prayers to God.

The Apostle Paul wrote in his First Letter to the Corinthians, explaining how Christians are to relate with one another, *“And so there is no division in the body, but all its different parts have the same concern for one another. If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it; if one part is praised, all the other parts share its happiness.”*

When I provided daily care for my ailing parents and Margaret’s mother suffered and died, **Margaret and I were blessed by the support and encouragement of a significant number of the members and friends of Round Grove United Church.** Also during those trying times and, especially, when my ministry was under attack, another support group was the monthly gathering of United Church of Christ Pastors of local UCC churches in the D/FW area. Their support, encouragement, and counsel were also a great blessing.

So, each of us are called to be with one another to comfort, encourage, heal, support, and pray for each other. **Coming together as a united, supportive, and loving community of believers, in addition to our personal prayer life, is an extremely important expression of how “God works for” the “good” of each of us!** One valuable aspect of our life together, in particular, is our **praying in Worship and at other times for one another.**

When troubles or difficulties come upon each of us or any of us or on anyone we know, remember God is for us – “God works for” our “good” – God’s Holy Spirit pleads for us! Trust in God’s Love for you and for all of us, “for there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.” Amen.