

SUSTAINED BY SCRIPTURE'S SONG - MORE THAN CONQUERORS
A SERMON BASED ON ROMANS 8:28-39
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO
SUNDAY, MARCH 17, 2019
10:00 a.m.

As soon as someone says to me,

or has said to me

or tries to say to me,

'It's for your own good',

I know I probably am not going to like what's next.

Mom first taught me, 'It's for your own good.' at the dinner table.

'It's for your own good' was always about,

brussel sprouts, tomato juice,

or loose cooked ground beef with onion chopped into it.

She even called it hamburger mush.

Eat it, 'it's for your own good.'

She never passed me an extra six warm chocolate chip cookies

fresh out of the oven and said,

'here, eat these, they're for your own good.'

'It's for your own good.' were the words my phys ed. teacher
said to me on my very first day of high school.

My very first class on my very first day was phys ed.

As if I wasn't already feeling awkward enough,
we were told to change into our shorts and t-shirts and
were marched outside to our 75 minute class
on my high school's back field.

We ran wind sprints.

We ran full sprints.

We did push ups and sit ups

Then, for the remainder of the class, about 30 minutes,
we were to run the track.

I was told It was for our own good.

When the whistle blew to call us in to sit down.

I did, and was promptly sick to my stomach.

It was 10:15 a.m. on the first day of high school,

awkward and lanky, and retching,

I had made my first impression.

And... 'It was for my own good.'

When you are with your financial advisor,
and she says, “This is for your own good.”
You know you won’t be back into the mall for at least a year.

So when you read Romans chapter 8
and it says ‘all things work together for good’
for your own good
you are justified if it makes you feel a little nervous.

Now to be fair,
Romans 8 is an awesome, spectacular, life-giving passage.
I could find you at least six potential life verses in here.
As a way to get to know someone or liven up a dinner party,

You may have asked the question,
If you were stranded alone on a desert island,
what book would you want with you?
In church land, so you know, the answer is always, I’d bring a Bible.
But if you went further with that question and asked,
but what if you could only have one page of your Bible,
which would you pull out and keep?

I would seriously consider taking Romans 8.

It is that good and it is that powerful.

But even still,

there is that phrase,

Romans 8:28

‘And we know that all things work together for good

for those who love God.’

It is for your own good.

Romans 8:28 can really throw a person for a loop.

For the simple reason that much of life does not seem to be

working out for our good, at all.

Life has its seasons,

and so it can be easy to question the truth of this verse,

in all things God works together for the good of those who love him.

The minister’s family is not immune to life’s seasons

as we said goodbye to all four of our parents and my sister-in-law

inside of four years.

Your family has gone through seasons too.

Because of my role,

I have privilege of knowing many of your stories

what you have gone through

what you are going through.

There have been cancer diagnoses and treatment plans.

There is grief.

There have been relationship difficulties.

Jobs were lost.

Plans didn't get carried out in the way you thought.

All you have to do is talk to any person

for a few moments,

to learn there is something in every person's life,

something that makes you wonder

if this is indeed for your own good,

because it tastes like brussel sprouts.

Then,

on those days when you think you are just teetering at the edge,

you come down with a head cold

and get a flat tire just to tip the scale.

All things work together for good for those who love God,

It does not always seem good to me.

This passage can really confuse us,

especially if we are not honest about the tough seasons.

Things happen that do not seem good.

Which then makes me ask,

'Could it be the case that if 'good' is for those who love God,

perhaps I don't love God? or love God enough?

Or perhaps even though I love God,

I haven't been called according to his purpose?

Perhaps I'm on the train that leads to the wrong purpose.

Perhaps I missed my connection

and that's why this isn't working out for me.

Maybe that is the reason why

things aren't working together for my good.

We can look at the challenges in our lives,

and easily doubt this passage.

Now, again, to be fair.

The apostle Paul in writing this letter

is not naive.

He isn't a 'just think positive and the universe will give you positive'
kind of teacher.

He is not naive to the problems that we encounter.

If anything, Paul seems to have an even greater awareness,

that there is a lot that isn't good.

His list of 'not good' is extensive.

He asks the question,

'Will trouble, or distress, or persecution, or famine,
or nakedness, or danger or sword
separate us from the love of Christ?'

Persecution, famine, danger, war.

Paul is thinking about hardship well beyond

my inability to get the car started that time I was in a hurry.

He can name the big stuff.

He isn't hiding from the scary stuff;

persecution, famine, danger, war.

Yet he is still able to write,

‘And we know,

that all things work together for good,

for those who love God,

who are called according to his purpose.’

Which makes me think,

maybe what I think is good

is a little different than what God thinks is good.

I mean, I’ve been there before,

confronted with conflicting ideas of what is good.

I’ve thought candy was really good.

My mom was inclined to vegetables and their vitamins and fibre.

I’ve thought maybe a nice easy game of 21

at the basketball net would be good.

My phys. ed. teacher wanted me to have cardiovascular fitness.

I thought a trip to the mall would be good.

The financial advisor

thought a lock down on spending would be more helpful
to my long term financial future.

What is good?

Our definition of good tends to be a lazy one.

It doesn't have strength, or endurance, or a long term view.

We underestimate and underthink and undervalue - good.

Good is what I like.

Good is what I enjoy.

Good is being spared any pain, hardship or difficulty.

Good is having all my needs met and all my wishes granted.

Good is getting what I want.

Our definition of good can be a lazy one.

In the gospel of Mark,

a rich man had come running up to Jesus with a question.

Because of his wealth you can assume that he was enjoying
the 'good' life.

Enjoying the 'good' life, he asked Jesus,

Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Jesus said an interesting and unusual thing to him.

Why do you call me good?

No one is good - except God alone.

God is good.

Only God is good.

Our definition of good is lazy.

Only God is good.

And we know that all things work together for good,

together for God, toward God

for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Things aren't working together so you can have the good life.

Only God is good.

Things are working together so that you can have God.

God is good.

You are called according to God's purpose.

And his purpose for you?

Paul names God's purpose for you.

Your purpose is to be conformed,

to be shaped to the image of his Son,

to carry the likeness of Christ,

to bear the family resemblance and be the sister, brother

of Jesus himself.

God is good.

God is holy.

You are to be shaped into holiness, into goodness.

We undervalue good if we think it is just being happy,

or what we want.

God is good.

And God is moving you closer to himself,

in likeness and in character,

in holiness.

All things work together for good, for those who love God.

It's for your good.

The idea that I can be like Christ

well there are days that sounds just about impossible to me.

I can barely make it through the morning at the house,

without feeling hard done by

simply because we're out of coffee cream.

Conformed to the image of Christ?

That seems near impossible.

But Paul says, it isn't.

It isn't impossible.

Even in all these things, hard, challenging, doubt-inducing things

we are more than conquerors.

All things work together for good,

all things can work together to shape you to the image of Christ,

to make you God-like;

in love, righteousness, compassion and faithfulness.

God predestined it.

It was his intention for you from before you were born,

that you would be a sister or brother of Christ.

He called you.

He justified you.

And he will glorify you.

God is for you.

He gave his Son for you.

He will take and shape whatever comes your way,

easy or difficult

and use it to bring you to Christ's likeness,

to bring you to himself,

to bring you to holiness,

to bring you to glory.

He will make you more than a conqueror.

Some of the things that come our way are tough.

loss, financial hardship, relationship challenges,

health concerns,

sacrifices that make us feel like sheep to be slaughtered,

but as tough as those things may be,

God can use them to work together for our good.

To bring us to him.

To make us like him.

To make us more than conquerors.

On those occasions

conformed to the image of Christ,

we have complete victory through him who loved us.

Complete goodness.

Complete glory.

Neither death, nor life,

nor angels, nor heavenly rulers,

nor things that are 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.

Nothing can separate us from Christ's love.

Nothing.

We are more than conquerors

because of the love of Christ.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God,
who've been called according to his purpose.

Even the tough things.

Sometimes, especially the tough things.

I've watched us all go through tough things over the years.

It could have sounded like an insensitive

and possibly even cruel thing for me to say to you at that time,

'We know that all things work together for good

for those who love God,

who've been called according to his purpose.'

Yet in those exact times,

I've seen some of you learn to trust God,

more than you trust yourself.

I've seen some of you learn that God will indeed be faithful,

but not perhaps, in the way you imagined.

I've seen some of you set on a new path,

that you wouldn't have found if the old one hadn't been blocked.

I've seen the growth

of a deeper faith,

of a stronger trust,
of a persistent patience,
of a more generous grace,
of a greater family resemblance
to your brother, Christ.

All things work together for good.

All things can work toward God for those who love him.

He predestined. He called. He justified. He will glorify.

Nothing can separate us from his love so

we are more than conquerors.

I have watched some of you grieve.

It could have sounded like an insensitive and even cruel

for me to say to you at that time,

‘We know that all things work together for good

for those who love God,

who’ve been called according to his purpose.’

But as you’ve carried your loss,

I've seen the awareness come,
that the person you loved was a gift,
not an entitlement.

That the size of the ache
is a measure of the size of the love you were given.

I've seen the awareness come,
that if that kind of love just begins to compare
to the kind of love that God has for us,
then with a startlingly realization
you have begun to see how deep powerful and raw is the ache
of God's love for you.

No wonder it brings us to life.

In your loss,

I've seen a greater family resemblance
to your brother Christ.

All things work together for good.

For those who love God, all things work us toward God.

And so we are more than conquerors.

I've watched some receive a diagnosis.

It could have sounded like insensitive and cruel for me to say at that time,

'We know that all things work together for good

for those who love God,

who've been called according to his purpose.'

But then I've watched as they've said the words to loved ones

that should have been said years ago.

I've watched people wake up and remember to kiss their spouse.

to say thank you for coffee.

And marvel at the beauty of each day.

I've watched as people have considered how

they could have their life

make a difference and bring goodness.

I've watched those around you love more freely.

I've seen a greater family resemblance

to your brother Christ, because of a diagnosis.

All things work together for good.

All things work toward God for those who love him.

And so, we are more than conquerors.

It can be a tough, tough journey.

The writer of Hebrews says,

‘Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as his child.

Training you. Raising you up.

God disciplines us, works us, for our good,

that we may share in his holiness.’

He will glorify you.

You are more than conquerors.

It can be a tough, tough journey.

But know this,

Neither death, nor life,

nor angels, nor heavenly rulers,

nor things that are present, nor things to come,

nor powers, nor height, nor depth,

nor anything else in creation

will be able to separate us from the love of God

in Christ Jesus our Lord.

All things work together for good for those who love God.

all things work toward God,

for those who are called according to his purpose.

God's purpose for you is to work things together for your good.

Your good, is to end up like Christ.

Called. Justified. Glorified.

So keep to the journey.

It is making you holy.

It is bringing you to God.

It is all working for your good.

There is nothing that can separate you from the love of Christ,

and so, you are more than conquerors.

Amen.