

## **Sermon: Sunday, July 26, 2020**

**Ann Burnham, Lay Minister**

Readings: Old Testament: Psalm 105: 1-11

New Testament: Romans 8: 26-39

### **Recalculating**

The Book of Romans was written by the apostle Paul and is an impassioned and theological letter to the church in Rome. Paul wanted to visit the church in Rome and now that he had finished his work in the east, he planned to head to Spain to establish a church there, and wanted to visit Rome but first he had to go to Jerusalem to bring a collection for the poor Christians there.

The Book of Romans is certainly not a letter but a summarization of Christian theology and an organized statement of his faith. The simplest way to say it is this: God is faithful to us and will never abandon us. Salvation is available to all, all of us, no matter Jew or Gentile, no matter the color of our skin or the country we come from. God's eternal purpose is to save believers without undermining human choice or responsibility. In the beginning of Romans Paul provides the facts of the gospel and explains why he is such a devoted missionary to a world that desperately needs God. Sound familiar?

Don't you feel we need God now more than ever? I certainly do – things are a bit of a mess!

Paul explains the importance of following God's law to the extent that we are a slave to God's law, which we agree with, but it is so hard to keep His commands. We try and then we go off course so we pray although sometimes we don't really know what to pray so we might just say one of the basic prayers but praying is so much more than that. What good is it to repeat the Lord's Prayer, or the Apostle's Creed if you don't feel it? This is what the reading is referring to when it says the "Spirit will help us in our weakness". It is like that patient lady on your Garmin when you miss a turn, that says, "recalculating"! You have gone off course so now it will have you take a right, then another right, and another one until you have gone full circle to get you back on course. Sure enough, you will most likely err again and hear "recalculating" again, just as we do in following God's law and you will need the Spirit to help you again and again.

The reading says, "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". With sighs too deep for words", and other translations say, "with groans that words cannot express". There is a Greek word that you won't find in the Greek dictionary – one that is used in everyday Greek. *Parapono* – It is a devastating heartache – a pain so deep it is beyond explanation. In fact, just the word heartache does not describe it deeply enough. Like many languages, it is the *way the word is pronounced* that explains the depth of the meaning. I believe that is meaning Paul is trying to convey. The Holy Spirit comes to us providing the words we need and intercedes for us. With the Spirit, we can pray mightily, and we must trust that God hears our prayers and will do what is best. What is best may not always be what we want but verse 28, tells us that "God works for the good of those who love Him". God works in all situations and all things, not just isolated or random things. We know that doesn't mean that only good things will come to us because we know there is still evil in this world – you only have to read the news to know that.

Sometimes, we may feel like we can't find the words to pray because we feel we have gone astray and are ashamed because we have been so tied up in duties and responsibilities that we have not had time to read our bible, or have been irritable to people. It could be a thousand things that are distracting us from God. Maybe you feel you are not worthy of salvation because you have stumbled more than once. You have heard "recalculating" a number of times. Don't!! Don't you believe it. If God sacrificed his Son for you, he is not going to withhold salvation. He has a goal for you, and for all of us.

So, what do you think God's real goal for us is? A big house, a nice car, and money in the bank? No, God wants us to be more like his Son, more like Christ. That is why we hear the words, that God foreknew and predestined us to be conformed like Christ – the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. That us – the brothers and sisters of Christ Jesus! Wow let that sink in a minute. He predestined and called us but still gave us free will – the free will to love and follow Him or to reject Him. For those who followed the call to love and follow God, he justified and glorified.

I love Paul's next line asking us, "so what do you say to that?". Of course, I am paraphrasing here but as Paul and many, many other people throughout history have said, "If God is for us, who can be against us?". Those words ring true, don't they? No matter what happens, it is God who sacrificed his only Son, so that we would be saved. The followers of Christ would face many terrible things as some still do today, but they would not renounce Him.

When we are feeling overwhelmed by the virus, by sheltering in place, by wearing masks, by not meeting in our church, by not singing praises to the Lord together do not be discouraged for we do not have to hide our love of Christ or the fact that we are committed to God. We are Christians who can meet on Zoom, we can meet outside, we can ring our church bells, we can wear our crosses around our necks and claim our Christianity out loud because "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Amen