



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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August 21, 2011

10th Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon Text: [Romans 8:28-30](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [1 Kings 3:5-12](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 119b](#)

Second Lesson: [Romans 8:28-30](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 13:44-52](#)

The Christian Faith, One Word at a Time: *Chosen*

Do you remember picking teams when you were a kid growing up, maybe playing at recess, playing at school or something like that? You have two captains who would have to pick teams. They would go back and forth and pick one and then pick the other. Do you remember doing that at all? I don't know if kids still do that today. In today's society, we give everyone a trophy for showing up, so we probably have different ways of doing it so people don't get their feelings hurt or things like that anymore.

It did hurt feelings at times, didn't it? "Why wasn't I chosen right away? I'm better than that schlunko that person chose. What are they, mad at me? What's wrong with them? How come I'm still standing here? How come I'm the last one?" That kind of scars you, doesn't it, the idea that you had to wait to be chosen? It's not a happy thing. It's not a good time. You didn't run home to tell mom and dad, "Guess what? I was the last one chosen today." Did you? If you told them, you weren't smiling, right? Chosen, being chosen can have a lot of affects on us.

As Paul has been writing to the Romans, over the last two weeks and then today, three weeks in a row we've been looking at in Romans 8 how he explains, as Christians who are going to face suffering, how we should face them. He told us to long for heaven. Long for heaven. Know that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us. So set your heart on heaven as you are going through suffering. That will help you to get through it. This is what he was saying.

Last week he told us, "as you go through that suffering, even as you're longing for heaven, you're going through stuff that you don't understand or you don't know what to pray for, but guess what? I'm right there praying for you." The Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

Today he tells us that all things work together for our good. When we are going through the middle of suffering, do we want to say, "Really? Really God? This is working for my good? I don't know that I believe it." But what God points us to is when he lined us up and when he chose us. That's what he is saying. "You can know that I'm going to make everything work out for your good because I chose you first. You weren't an afterthought." That's what he is telling us here today. This is something that should thrill us to the tips of our toes as we understand what he is saying.

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him. First of all, we get this passage messed up. All things work together for our good. The good that we think of is that it makes me happy. If it makes me happy, it is good, right? That isn't always the case, is it? There are times when my sinful nature convinces me that something is going to make me happy. Your sinful nature convinces you that something is going to make you happy that is not for your good, not for your eternal good, it's something that hurts God and ends up hurting you. So we have to get the sinful nature out of that equation of thinking about what is for our good.

What is for our good, what is for our eternal good is anything that brings us closer to our God and leads us to rely more on our God instead of on our own two feet or our two hands or what is between our ears; to rely on him and his love and his purpose. Anything that leads us to do that is going to be for our eternal good, even if it hurts for a time. That I can be sure of, and God says you can be sure of that. Why? Because those *“who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.”*

Those God has called according to his purpose...when did he call them? Those he foreknew. He knew before time began is what we are told in Ephesians. God elected us to be his own before time. God chose us as his own. He foreknew us. He predestined us to be his own. We are one of God's elect. Why? Because he has called us. In time he acted. He acted through the Word, through water and the Word. He called us to be his own, to believe that Jesus is our Savior, that Jesus lived in our place and died in our place and took away all of our sins. The God who foreknew us and predestined us also acted so that we would believe this truth. That's how I can know that God will in all things work for the good of those who love him.

But think about what he said in those phrases. First of all, who is doing the acting in every one of those phrases? God called. God foreknew. God predestined. God conformed us to be to the likeness of his Son. God is the subject. God is doing all the acting. So what God is telling us right here is that when we are going through suffering, we should be putting our focus on him and not on ourselves, right? But what is natural for you and me? What's natural for us and for our sinful nature is to look at our own belly buttons when we are going through suffering. “Woe is me.” Right? We are good at that. We've got that nailed. We don't need to be encouraged in that. We can do that really well. Our sinful nature can do it really, really well. “Woe is me. Why would God let this happen to me? God, don't you love me?” All these kinds of things that we'll ask as we are going through suffering. It's natural. It's our sinful nature. It's what I'm sure many of you do. It's what I do.

When I'm the subject, or you're the subject, we end up doing silly things. We doubt the God who loves us, who has told us he loved us before time began. “You were standing on that line and I pointed at you and said, ‘You. I want you on my team,’ before there was an eye to twinkle.” That's what he did. So he loves us. That's obvious. We can trust that all things will work together for our good because he is the one doing the acting.

Now think about the action he takes, the action he takes that gives us confidence. He conformed us to be to the likeness of his Son. Think about that for a moment. When God looks at you or God looks at me, he doesn't see all the times we've doubted him, all the times we've questioned him, he doesn't see the times we've figuratively shook our fist at God and said, "What in the world are you doing? You shouldn't let this happen!" He doesn't see that. What does he see? The likeness of his Son.

He no longer sees our sins. He sees Jesus' perfection; the one who said "Lord, take this cup away from me. I don't want this cup. This cup doesn't taste that good. Take it away from me. But not my will, your will be done." The one who perfectly trusted that God would work all things for everyone's eternal good. He did that in our place where you and I don't. He took all of our doubts and uncertainties, all of our challenging God as we suffer, he took it all to the cross and took it all away. Then God, through the Spirit working in Word and Sacrament conformed us to be the likeness of his Son.

That should just thrill us. That should just amaze us. You can look into your heart, right? You know the black spots of your own heart and your own mind. From time to time, we all can see the glimpses of the blackness of each other's sinful nature, our rebellion against God in our lives and our words and our actions. We know what we're like. Yet, God conformed us to the likeness of his Son.

Yes, we can know that all things will work together for the good of those who love God. Those he called, those he foreknew, he predestined. Those he predestined, he called. Those he called, he justified. He declared us not guilty because he has conformed us to the likeness of his Son. That's all amazing and that all should just thrill us, but there's a phrase in here that should really confuse us. It should really make us stop and go "Huh? I don't get it?" If you're looking at that phrase and you're going "I don't get it," and you're looking to the guy in the black robe to explain it to you, forget about it. I'm not going to be able to explain it to you.

Do you know which phrase I'm talking about in the sermon text from what I read to you in Romans? "...*those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*" It doesn't say that he will glorify; glorified...past tense. Does that confuse you? It confuses me. I wake up many mornings and I don't feel like I've already been glorified. I lay my head on the pillow at the end of the night and look back over what I've done during the day and I don't feel like I have been glorified. I'm still troubled by my own sinful nature. I'm still troubled by my weaknesses and shortcomings just like you are. Yet God looks at you and he looks at me and says "You have been glorified."

I don't get it. I can understand that some day I'll be in the glory of heaven, which I told you last week I don't get either, but God seeing it as past tense? He sees it as an accomplished purpose. That ought to tell us at least this much...when God says all things will work together for the good of those who love him, he means it. He sees it as already an accomplished fact in his eyes.

Yes, we've been transformed to the likeness of his Son. I suppose in that sense, we have been glorified. Yes, we have eternal life right now, but we live with the affects of a sinful world. Yet, in God's eyes, he already sees us with him in the perfection that is heaven. I can't fathom that. But doesn't it thrill you to know that's how God looks at you? He looks at you as already being there with the saints and angels praising him. Those he has called, he has also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

So all things work together for the good of those who love him, and those who love him get to do what our Gospel talked about this morning. In our Gospel, this is at the end of all this long chapter of all these parables that Jesus had to explain and then he had to explain again when he was with his disciples. Now he gets done with them all and he looks at them all and he says, "Do you understand this?" They say "yes," and I have to think they are going "no." They are saying yes and their head his shaking no because it just seems like they didn't fully grasp a lot of it. But notice what he says...when you understand these things, when you understand the kingdom of God, when you understand that all things work together for the good of those who love God who have been called according to his purpose, when you understand that, if you looked at the end of the phrase in the Gospel, it says, then you're like someone who has this big storeroom. You've got a big vault in your basement. I don't care if you don't have a basement, you've got a big vault in your basement. It's a storeroom that now that you know this truth you can go into it anytime you want and bring out new treasures as well as old because you know that those God has called, he has justified, he has glorified. You know that all things will work together for your good, and you have the ability now, after you are a believer, to go and spend time with the Spirit of God, not just praying to him, but listening to him talk to you, listening to him opening your eyes to see new and great and wonderful things in his Word, day after day after day. The more you pull those treasures out of that old storeroom, the more you will face suffering with the knowledge that "yes, God is going to work it for my good. I don't know how. I don't know how he could possibly do it, but he's the guy that brought me to faith, so he can do it."

So you can make use of it, or you can walk on by. I'd encourage you to dig into that storeroom.