

Sunday 26th July 2026 – Family Service

Genesis 29:1-28

Psalms 105:1-11

Romans 8:26-39

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Who knows how a pearl is made?

It's like an oyster taking something that irritates the oyster (like a splinter in a finger) -and turning it into something of great value. Oysters create pearls by coating an irritant with layers of nacre, commonly known as mother of pearl, gradually forming a precious pearl. Out of hardship and discomfort comes beauty.

There seems to be a very strong theme coming through in today's readings about God's plan and purpose for the people of God. God always wants what is best for us, and this is something that gives us hope.

In Genesis, Jacob goes to Haran to find a wife to continue the promise that God made to Abraham. In the Psalm we see the people singing and worshipping and praising God for his faithfulness.

In the gospel reading Jesus teaches about the value of the Kingdom of God by using stories of small things like a mustard seed, a little bit of yeast, or a single precious pearl.

And then in Romans, we see the incredible statement made by Paul that in the end, all things work together for the good of those who love God. Despite the suffering and pain and struggles that the faithful face in this life, we are all assured that in the long run, God will work all things for our ultimate good.

Today I would like to focus on what Paul is so passionate about.

I think that most of us have at some or other time struggled with our faith and the question of whether God hears us at all. We perhaps wonder at times whether God continues to remember us, especially when things start to fall apart, or things don't go our way – when we lose hope. I have certainly felt this from time to time.

It is only when we look back on what has happened in our lives that we can discern the unfolding plan of God. Then we are able to see that we have never been abandoned or forgotten. Then we are able to see the way in which God has worked in and through the complex web of our lives.

God uses all of our circumstances to work for our good when we have faith. In other words, when we are Christ-like, God can take the negative circumstances of our lives and use them for our good, especially if using them for good fulfils his will for our lives.

There are many passages that speak of God's love in the bible but none more important than what Paul has to say here. These verses describe God's unfailing love and his plan for our lives, and the assurance that nothing can separate us from His love.

Paul begins with an important statement: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Here, we see the foundational truth that God is all powerful and all loving.

He watches over everything in our lives, even the trials and tribulations, to bring about good. There are many examples in the Bible.

Take Joseph, for example. He was sold into slavery by his brothers and ended up in jail in Egypt, but God used all of these experiences to prepare Joseph for his ultimate role of saving his family and the people of Egypt from famine. While still in prison, Joseph correctly interpreted dreams for two of Pharaoh's servants-his cupbearer and chief baker. As the dreams had predicted, the baker was executed and the cupbearer was restored to service.

Two years later, Pharaoh had two dreams that disturbed him, but no one could tell him what they meant. The cupbearer remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh about him. Pharaoh sent for Joseph, who told him that God was warning that a famine was coming and that preparations had to be made. Joseph was released from prison and put in charge of the preparations.

When the famine came, it was widespread and affected Joseph's family. The same brothers who sold Joseph into slavery came to Egypt to find food. Joseph still loved them and forgave them. He arranged for all of the family to move to Egypt. Pharaoh promised them the best of the land.

Joseph trusted God through many years of hardship, and God worked all of those painful circumstances for the good of Joseph, his family and God's chosen people in the generations to come.

However, we mustn't misunderstand what Paul is saying. He is not saying that God creates trials, tribulations and suffering to bring about good.

No, these exist in the world because our world has fallen away from God. But God doesn't abandon us – just as Joseph declared when his brothers committed evil against him. He said to them – "what you intended for evil, God used for good." Through their evil God used Joseph to feed the world during a 7-year famine. Life presents us with challenges at times that often leave us questioning God's goodness. Illness, financial struggles, relationship issues—these can hide the goodness of God. Yet, Paul assures us that God is at work.

We may not see the immediate results, but God's purpose for us is eternal life. We must understand that God's definition of goodness may differ from ours. God's goodness is about us not losing our faith and reaching eternal life. God's desire is for all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth.

The presence of suffering does NOT mean the absence of God's love. But through faith we can experience, as Paul said earlier, the formation of character, deeper faith, and a hope that assures us of God's love for us.

In everything, God's love and eternal plan for us remains paramount. And that's what Paul means when he says, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son..."

What does predestined mean? It means that God's plan is for all people to be saved. Does that mean everyone is saved?

No. Because of free will we can reject God's gift, but God doesn't stop loving us and working to call us back to him. Each one of us is called to a distinct purpose. God knows us intimately; He has a divine calling for our lives. We are not accidents or mere byproducts of evolution; we are chosen and cherished.

This is what Paul means in Ephesians 2 when he says - For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. Notice 2 things – we are God's masterpiece and he has planned good works for us long ago.

So being predestined calls us to adoption as God's children. This identity confers not just privilege, but responsibility. As adopted heirs of Christ, we reflect His love and grace to the world. And despite all the opposition – despite all the ridicule – despite all the persecution it is comforting to hear Paul say - "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

When God is our advocate, when God is in our corner, the forces of darkness and discouragement are, in fact, powerless against us. When faced with trials—physical, emotional, or spiritual—we have no fear.

As King David says in Psalm 23 – even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death – I will not be afraid because you are with me. And because God is with us then we are reminded that "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

This is our victory: not through our strength but through His love.

Our circumstances may be difficult at times, but with God's love, we can endure! And God's love, when it comes to God, is not negotiable. Paul says nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nothing!

Not suffering, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, or sword—none of it can break our relationship with Him. This teaches us about the certainty of our salvation.

As Paul says earlier in Romans. There is NO condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Regardless of what we face, we can rest in the assurance that God’s love remains steadfast and sure. This gives me an incredible sense of hope!

G. K. Chesterton (English writer, critic, and Christian apologist whose wit, paradoxes, and defence of faith made him a towering figure in early 20th-century literature.) says:

“As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is a mere flattery or platitude; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength at all. Like all the Christian virtues, it is as unreasonable as it is indispensable.”

Or as Paul says in Romans:

“Hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for that which he sees?” (8:24).

Viktor Frankl was a psychiatrist from Vienna who lived through the Nazi concentration camps of World War II. In his books, he talks about the survivors. They survived, not because their world encouraged their survival—far from it. They survived because they were able, somehow, to keep hope alive in spite of the hopelessness around them. Frankl says that it was this ability to be “sane” in the midst of insanity—to find “meaning” in the midst of meaninglessness—and “hope” in the midst of hopelessness—that kept these people alive.

God invites us to walk in faith, trusting that even our darkest days cannot extinguish His light and love. And we are invited to respond to the overwhelming love of God by sharing it with others. In a world filled with uncertainty, we are called to be beacons of hope. To speak words of encouragement, to extend grace, and to embody the love that we have received.

So, while the road of life may be filled with challenges, let us find comfort and assurance in the promises found in what Paul says about God’s love.

God is sovereign, our identity in Christ is secure, our victory is certain, and God’s love is inescapable.

May we walk in this truth, inviting others to experience the eternal love of our Saviour.

Amen.