

*26Likewise 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. 27And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.*

*29For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. 30And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

*31What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? 33Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. 35Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." 37No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39nor 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.*

Years ago my brother-in-law wanted to teach me about knowing what is good and what is bad in life. This is the story he told me:

Two men were talking. The first told the other, "My horse ran away last week."

"Oh, that is bad," the other responded.

"Well, not necessarily," the first said, "you see, the next day that horse came into our barnyard leading a herd of wild horses."

"Now, that was certainly good," the other was quick to say.

"Well, not necessarily," the first answered him. "You see, my son decided to ride one of those wild horses, fell off and broke his leg."

"Oh, how unfortunate that such a bad thing happened," the other declared.

"Well, not necessarily," the first said once more, "That very afternoon the army came to our place in order to recruit my son to go off to war – because of the broken leg they left him at home, safe with me."

My brother-in-law told that story to teach me that sometimes we just do not know enough to judge what is good and what is bad.

St. Paul wrote: “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.”

I remember hearing the news about a fellow pastor and his wife. Their newborn child had a rare condition that meant that he would not develop normally and would not live very long. The doctors had advised that they not even take the child home but provide for custodial care until the child died. But they did not heed that advice.

A year later at the District convention in Bismarck, North Dakota I saw their child. It was hard not to stare. But it was clear that his child was loved by his parents.

St Paul wrote: “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.”

He had done nothing but love, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, even teaching his enemies the way of God. Some bowed down to him – a few spoke words of thanks – but most just took from him what they needed or wanted and went their own way. One moment a crowd was shouting “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” and were waving palm branches and singing. A few days later another crowd cried, “Crucify him.” From the cross he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

And he died.

By all that eyes can see and ears hear he was God forsaken – abandoned – his love and giving all came to nothing.

“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.”

Is this what God has planned for those who love God? To be givers of love and to be crucified like Jesus? Sometimes it seems so.

Love is costly. Ask a mother who has been up all night with a sick child. Ask the folks who sacrifice their time, money and their pleasures for homeless families. Ask soldiers and police officers and high school principals who dedicate their lives to guarding and guiding others. Sometimes the good that comes out of loving is as invisible as the yeast that is in a ball of dough or a treasure buried in a field.

But one day when all the horses have run away and come home and all those born unlucky have ended their suffering God promised that those who love God will be born to a new life – a resurrected life – a glorious life with Jesus the firstborn within a large family. Only then will we know what has been good in the lives of those who love God.

Until that day you are called to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and your neighbor as yourself.

God will be at work in all things for your good.

Amen.

