



One Page Sermon

By Pastor Robb McCoy

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Pentecost and Paul's hope

Recap of Sermon from 5/28/23 by Robb McCoy
Scripture: Acts 2:1-4, Romans 8:18-31

On this Pentecost Sunday, the Narrative Lectionary gives us the regular Acts 2 story of the Holy Spirit descending upon the disciples, but combines it with a part of Paul's letter to the Romans. Romans 8:28 always brings me back in time – to circa 2002 and the very first sermon I preached. I was hired at age 24ish to be youth director at Mackinaw UMC by Rev. Dan Powers.

One Sunday early in my tenure there, I was given a chance to preach. Being 24ish, I picked "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" (NIV) as my text.

I don't remember much about that sermon, but two things stand out. The first are the words of encouragement Rev. Dan (he'll always be Reverend Dan to me) gave me afterwards. "You really picked a tough one," he told me without an ounce of sarcasm or incredulity at my hubris for trying to tackle the age-old problem of theodicy in my very first sermon. It was good enough that he asked me to preach again and again, and eventually guided me in my candidacy and helped lead me to seminary. I'll be forever grateful to him for the patience and guiding care he gave me in my two years at Mackinaw UMC.

The second thing I remember is the face of my Mom after I was done. My Mom was the one who first planted the seed of my call into my heart when I was a teenager. I'll never forget the look on her face when she saw me living into the role she had seen for me years before.

My relationship with this verse however, has evolved over the years. Twenty years later I do not think I could summarize my view of "all things happening for good" as succinctly or as confidently as I did that day in Mackinaw. I know a deeper sense of loss, of frustration, and grief than I did that day. I'm not saying I have felt great suffering, but I have questioned many times the goodness of all things. I am more acquainted with lament today than I was then.

15 years after that sermon in Mackinaw, I sat beside my mother as she was dying with cancer gripping her brain. At that bedside I experienced the verse that comes a few before v. 28, "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 groanings too deep for words." (Romans 8:26, NRSV).

Paul reminds the Romans that suffering is a part of life. Indeed, for those who follow Christ, it should be an expected part of life. Not because God wills suffering on the faithful, but because the world will pour out suffering on those who follow Christ. And God will pour out grace to overcome it all. The way of Christ is a way of love, patience, generosity, forgiveness, and justice. This way is often met with fear and reprisal. In fact, Paul's message of the Cross is that love will suffer these things. The Cross is a reminder that love will bear

these things for the sake of love, even in the midst of suffering.

God doesn't give us suffering, but the Cross is a reminder that Jesus endured suffering for the sake of love, and resurrection is a reminder that love wins. Christ crucified and Christ resurrected reveals God can transform the worst suffering the world can dole out.

It is the Holy Spirit that raised Christ from the dead. It is the Holy Spirit that blew through an upper room in Jerusalem and swept the disciples out in the public square to testify to the Risen One. It is the Holy Spirit that empowered those disciples with visions and dreams and words of prophecy and love. It was the Holy Spirit that gave Paul confidence to hope for what is to come despite all worldly evidence that said he should fear.

It was the Holy Spirit that swept over me this past Sunday as I laid my hands on my nephew being confirmed in a Lutheran Church near my hometown. I heard my Mother's voice as we sang her favorite hymn. I saw my mother's face look down upon Luke in the same way she looked upon me that day in Mackinaw. I felt the Holy Spirit which gives me hope for things yet unseen.

It is the Holy Spirit that is sweeping through churches still. When the world is swept up in anger and violence. When wayward teens looking for directions are greeted at porches with guns. When nations are invaded by despots. When rainbow stickers on Target trigger anger and threats, the Holy Spirit speaks prayers of groaning too deep for words. The world is experiencing labor pains, but the joy of the Kingdom is coming. The suffering we endure will be transformed.

The Holy Spirit, which raised Christ from the dead, will raise this Church up too. We at Two Rivers Church are on the precipice of a major decision. In two weeks we will be deciding if we will join the Reconciling Ministries Network. We may become the third Reconciling Congregation in the IGRC. It is understandable if there is fear and trepidation around this decision. In a world with so much pain and anger, it can be easy to recoil. The Holy Spirit is calling us forward. When the noise of bigotry and fear is sweeping our culture, we can have hope because the same Holy Spirit that raised Christ from the dead will sweep us up, too.

When the wind of the Holy Spirit sweeps through our sanctuaries and pushes us out into the world in desperate need of love and grace. When the Holy Spirit reconciles the Church to the ones who have been harmed by dogma. When the Holy Spirit gives us the confidence we need to stand strong for justice and compassion. When we recognize the power of the Holy Spirit working in the lives of all people. When the Holy Spirit fills all people with the power of love instead of the love of power, we will know peace. We will know Resurrection. May the winds of the Holy Spirit blow.