

Sermon for Proper 12A

Text: Romans 8:26

The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

It's the early hours of the morning, the family sleeps, and you are still wide awake and restless. You've tried to cast all your burdens on the Lord and let go but you just can't stop thinking about what it is that is keeping you awake. Your mind just won't switch off and let you sleep.

Whether it's about something to do with your bodies and the pain you're enduring or about to endure; it may be grief and confusion over events that you don't have any control over and don't understand; or anguish over why people treat you so badly. You just want it all to stop and go away.

Even when you pray, your prayer seems to be a mix of feelings of sadness, anger, pity, confusion, and how things could be different if this had been done or that had been said differently. Maybe you want to talk to God about it, but you can't get your thoughts together clearly enough to make any specific requests. And so, you lie restless and groan as time ticks by.

Have you had an experience like this? If so, then hopefully these words from Romans 8 encourage you: "The Spirit also comes to help us, weak as we are. For we do not know how we ought to pray; the Spirit himself pleads with God for us in groans that words cannot express" (Romans 8:26).

We can also reflect on the way Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knew the betrayal which was about to take place. The mental, spiritual and emotional torment must have been enormous as he thought about the events ahead of him and he prayed that somehow this terrible suffering could be avoided. He was left alone as his disciples slept.

With just one sentence, he placed everything into his Father's hands: "Father if you are willing take this cup of suffering from me; yet not my will but your will be done."

Just as on the cross his prayer was simply, "Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands". He didn't need to say more than he did because he was confident that his Father knew what was in his heart.

As Jesus unjustly hung on the cross in agony, he looked at his tormentors and prayed, "Father forgive them..." If we were in a similar situation, I hardly think we would be speaking words of forgiveness.

It's not easy for us to pray father forgive them, when injustice has been done to us. We want to see justice done and wickedness punished.

Just as it's not easy for us to pray: "Not my will, but your will be done". We prefer our will to be done, we prefer God to do what we think he ought to do for us. These can be the things that keep us awake at night as we brood over the undeserved and unjust hurts inflicted upon us.

Even though Jesus is divine, he is as human as you and me. He faced the same temptations, frustrations, and hurts as we do. He teaches us how to pray when we find ourselves in these situations. I would imagine many other times Jesus was frustrated with his disciples when they just weren't able to grasp what his mission was all about.

He must have been almost driven to despair at the failure of the Jews to understand that the Kingdom of God they so longed for was amongst them and yet they refused to accept and believe.

Often throughout the Gospels we read where Jesus prayed. He prayed alone, he prayed in public, he prayed for himself, he prayed for his disciples. He prayed that he may bring glory to his heavenly Father.

Jesus still prays and intercedes for us through his Spirit. Especially during those times when everything is going wrong and it's a hard thing for us to praise God. Those times when we don't know what we should ask for, we don't know what words to use, and aren't able to put into words our innermost desires and feelings.

Even though our prayers may sound like groans that we find hard to express, it doesn't matter. Because the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

Romans 8:28 reads, 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.

Yes, God works in all things, even the times we feel abandoned by God. This does not mean that all that happens to us is good. Things happen to us in our lives because of sins we have done, or what evil others do to us. Sometimes things just seem to happen randomly. God can work in each situation for our long-term good, even if that is in death, where pain, suffering, tears, sin and evil cease and we live with God forever.

There are times in our lives when things make no sense to why would God allow this to happen. Years later after a time of suffering, you may look back and still not see any good that came from what happened.

Yet as we live in this world, God's Spirit not only calls us to let God be God in the good times and bad, but he also speaks to God on our behalf with those things which we wish we could say. He takes our prayers and feeble expressions and groans and sighs and presents them to our heavenly Father.

Not only that the Spirit assures us, there is nothing that can get between God and his love for us.

As Paul writes “If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things. “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

If we want to be assured of the love of the Father when the worst happens in our life, those things that cause us to stay awake at night, then pause and focus on the cross of Jesus. There we see the love of God amid evil and suffering.

As Paul writes, what then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?

That is a real comfort to know. We are assured that no matter how bad things may seem, we have a God who loves us. His Spirit testifies to our Spirit that we are his much-loved children. May this always be our comfort and hope. Amen