

## WELCOME 10<sup>th</sup> November 2019 – 20 Pentecost '19 C

Romans 8:28-39 & Genesis 50:15-20

Person 1 - "Mate! You look awful! What's the deal? Are you ok?"

Person 2 - "No...I'm not ok. My ute was stolen last night & the police just rang to tell me they found it..."

P1 - They found it! Well that's good right?

P2 - They found it...on fire down in the Silvalite Reserve. My ute's a total loss.

P1 - Not your **work** ute?

P2 - Yes my **work** ute! Not just the ute, but the tools...gone.

P1 - Mate...your ute **AND** your tools. How are you going to work?

P2 - Oh...don't worry...It wasn't just the tools...It was every contract I had in process, every quote I was supposed to give to prospective clients this week...all of it...in the ute. All of it gone. I won't be able to work for...at least 2-3 months until I can replace all my stuff & start quoting jobs again.

P1 - 2-3 months...

P2 Yeah & you know in my line of work, you don't work you don't get paid & you don't get paid your bills don't get paid...I don't know what I'm going to do. I don't know what I'm going to say to my kids about Christmas...the 2 apprentices I have...they're great guys, but I can't keep them on if I don't have work for 2-3 months or maybe more...

P1 - I am so sorry...but look...I know this is hard to hear right now...but don't give up...God is not going to let this be the end of you. There's gotta be something just around the corner because you know...God promises, everything happens for a reason.

P3 - Umm...guys...just so we're clear here...God never said that.

When the bottom falls out. When we just can't see beyond the pain of the moment. When all our plans collapse before our very eyes.

Did the God who has committed himself to me in love set my life on fire as part of some cosmic "plan"?

Did the God who has sent even his own Son to die/rise for us suddenly decide to blow a hole in our lives as part of some greater good purpose?

Or...Does the Father who suffers the brokenness of sin in his Son stand with us in every moment and bring to us his presence & his promise that in all things he is working to conform us into the image of Christ and transform our lives for his glory?

The Bible **does** say: *"...we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, & endurance produces character, & character produces hope, & hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us"* Rom 5:3-5

We'll explore & experience that together today trusting that *"God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God & are called according to his purpose for them."* Rom 8:28

**Let's pray...**

### PRAYER OF THE DAY

Heavenly Father, in all things & in every season of life we know you never relax your embrace of our lives...Today again speak your promises into our hearts & draw us near to you. Let your life be made real in us in full abundance and give your Spirit free rein over our lives. We pray through Jesus Christ. Amen

**20 PENTECOST '19 C**  
**THINGS GOD NEVER SAID: EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON**

**FAITH CHAT:**

1. How do you think someone can “benefit” from a time of extreme difficulty?
2. When someone says “Everything happens for a reason,” What do you think?

Help me out: Heads or tails? (flip) Your turn. Heads/tails? (flip) Now you. Heads/tails? (flip) You know it's strange...every day, thousands (maybe millions) of Australians take a portion of their lives their security hopes dreams & futures & do this (flip). They take a portion of their lives hopes dreams security future & they wager it on random chance occurrences...bet it on the arbitrary re-arranging of animals or people or dots or cards or numbers...take a part of their lives & trust it to random chance indiscriminate arrangements...they entrust their well-being & that of their families to hit/miss haphazard strings of numbers, series of little pictures, dots on dice, cards, sporting events...colour of the tie the TV weatherman would wear You know what's even stranger? Some of those same people, when something awful happens...illness, death, job loss, car accident...will say with a straight face, “Everything happens for a reason...God has a plan here...This is God's will.” We live on one hand aware of random chance but on the other as if we're just puppets on string. So of all the things God never said, this one feels to me like Christmas lights...you thought you packed 'em away neat in some sense of order, but when you get 'em out again they're all tangled up & knotted...Pastor Adam Hamilton says in his book *Half-Truths*...there's just enough of a smell of reality there that makes it feel/seem true...& in some circumstances things do happen for a reason.

I got knocked off my bicycle a few weeks back because another cyclist was being careless when he rode past me & crashed into me & I fell off. My fall happened because he was reckless & knocked me over. We understand cause/effect. This happens & causes that. If you're texting & driving & you run into the car in front of you because they stopped while you were choosing emojis...There are reasons for what happens in those smaller circumstances...cause/effect.

And sometimes God does use the momentary collisions between us & someone else to turn our hearts or lives toward him in some way...Turvey Park Post Office a while back & I was in a hurry & the PO was cheek by jowl full of people & as the line crawled forward the lovely older lady in front of me didn't have enough money to send her package to whomever she was sending it...& I was like arrgh! But it hit me, what if I make up the difference? I reached in my pocket & laid a couple of gold coins in the midst of her coins & hey presto she had enough...She tried to say 'no' but in my heart I was thinking ok God, I get it, patience, be aware of the needs around you, compassion, no more arrgh. So there's a part of us that smells that little sniff of reality & thinks, “See! It's true.”

So it becomes convenient to look at something bigger more serious & try to assign cause to the biggest One around, God...lost wallet, late start missed the car wreck lost job, divorce, cancer, or that guy Pam & I met whose little girl died of a horrible genetic anomaly, or I always remember the 1<sup>st</sup> fatality the VRA called me to about 10 years ago out in Collingullie...bunch of kids got hurt but 1 15-yr-old girl left that paddock in a hearse...Man I hope nobody said that to them... Somewhere that convenient easy answer that sorta fit in the PO...collapses under its own weight

Because if “everything happens for a reason,” then that makes God responsible for everything...everything...He intends/causes everything. England beating the All Blacks was divinely ordained. Forget your anniversary? Sorry Honey, “God's will.” Now those are just silly but that 15-yr-old out in the paddock or a million slaughtered Rwandan tribal Tutsis or the folks on Malaysian Airlines flight 370 who have yet to be located...or a drought that doesn't let up...friend's suicide...those just stop you...

Some divine reason for **that**? Some holy purpose **there**? Suddenly you've drawn a picture of God I don't see in the Scriptures...*The Lord is compassionate & merciful, slow to get angry & filled with unfailing love...He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. – Ps 103:8-11* I mean seriously what sort of God would take time to put me in line behind some nice lady at the PO but not stop an airplane from flying into a building or off into oblivion? See, if “everything happens for a reason,” then that makes God responsible for everything... that makes God the instigator/causer of everything.

But before we go **there** we have to remember the complete pervasive nature & destructive presence of sin. We have to understand that as surely as every cell in our bodies is marked by the X &/or Y chromosomes that determine our sex every atom of the universe is warped by the S.I.N. that yields death & disorder & division & spins our lives into a self-absorbed death spiral...and creates tragedy & sorrow & abject horror the Father who created us in love for love never

designed or desired. Shark attacks & sickness, accidents & assassinations are not God's great banana peel just dropped down here for us to slip & fall over...but they are the outworking of human rebellion that corrupts to the core of human existence. *For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death & decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.* – Rom 8:18-22

Equally important to note...if “everything happens for a reason,” that gives me an excuse to be apathetic or indifferent to the world around me...Why bother trying to make stuff better? Why bother planning or preparing or studying if there's some “plan” “reason” that's going to get done in spite of me? It means I can stand back & ignore your pain your suffering your injustice...And we know better than that. *So it is a sin for the person who knows to do what is good & doesn't do it.* – Jas 4:17  
*God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.* – 1 Pt 4:10  
*Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows.* – Is 1:17

When the bottom falls out. When we just can't see beyond the pain of the moment. When all our plans collapse before our very eyes...John if you're saying God has not set my life on fire as part of some cosmic “plan” & has not suddenly blown a hole in my life as part of some greater good purpose...what then? Is there something we can say that God **has** said? Absolutely... Let me put these up...*Because God's children are human beings, made of flesh & blood, the Son also became flesh & blood. For only as a human being could he die, & only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.* – Heb 2:14-15 Scripture assures us that in the midst of crushing brokenness...whatever that looks like in your life at any given moment...the undeniable overwhelming love of God persists. God is not absent not uncaring not unhelping not irrelevant...but up in it with you...that's what incarnation means...God with us God for us...

Now these 2: *“And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God & are called according to his purpose for them.”* – Rom 8:28 *“You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.”* – Gen 50:20 Rather than the divine instigator holy causer of all manner of mayhem, scripture promises God is working for good in all things at all times in our lives...that the presence & power of Christ in us is more powerful than even the very worst we experience...that the Father chooses to use even the worst for good for the greatest number of people...Joseph says you chuckleheads wanted me dead but God wanted to use me to save your sorry lives. Whatever happens...whatever hurt pain disaster God is right there & is working to give us his love his joy his hope his promise comfort strength his people...

In this section of Romans 8 Paul asks a bunch of questions, but they all fall into 3 basic areas: 1. Will opposition from people or Satan be too great? 2. Will we fail because of our tendency to sin? 3. Will we be overcome by difficult times? And the answer to all three is a resounding repeated “NO!”

If God loves us enough to send his Son to the cross for us, we can be assured that God will be present in His Son by His Spirit in every moment, will give us everything we need at just the right time, & will never leave us or forsake us. Even in the most difficult of times, when our lives are threatened, when the bottom falls out, when we just can't see beyond the pain of the moment, when all our plans collapse before our very eyes...we can trust God's love & believe that through Christ we are being transformed into his image to reveal to the world God's glory as more than conquerors in all things.

Paul wraps it up with: “I am convinced.” The Father offers to us a deep & settled frame of mind attitude of our hearts. Our ultimate foundation source of strength & hope is the rock-solid commitment of the Father that nothing in this world or beyond can separate us from his love for us & his hold on our lives in Jesus Christ.

But even more...God does have a purpose & plan for us as his people... *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.* – Eph 2:10 God's great gift of his Son creates in us the capacity for living that love that power that joy that hope in specific ways that bless the world around us. God has planned that you & I will every day stand next to someone who needs us in some way...our hands our hearts our words our help our encouragement...Good works he planned for us to do...does not mean mapped out but that we are transformed into the likeness of Christ & bear his glory & his gospel to the world...Nobody else can do that but us.

Then the big one: *Then I saw a new heaven & new earth, for the old heaven & the old earth had disappeared; & I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, & they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, & there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All*

*these things are gone forever.*” – Rev 21:1-4 God plans to live among us to wipe away all our tears & obliterate death mourning crying & pain...so we live in the – triumph of love life joy forever.

Let's pray with that in mind... Father in all things you are with us and at all times are moving us toward your glorious triumph at the end of all things here on earth. Make us daily aware of your power within us and your love moving us toward our neighbour. When we feel overwhelmed, draw our hearts to your Son crucified, risen, and ruling in love; and pour out your Spirit to comfort and restore. Be our strength and our hope so we can offer your loving embrace to others...Jesus in your Name we pray...Amen.