

Sermon for August 10, 2014 – 9th Sunday After Pentecost

Romans 8:26,27 (NIV 84)

Theme: Your Great Prayer Partner

- 1) *He knows what to pray for.*
- 2) *God listens to his prayers.*

²⁶ *In the same way, 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.* ²⁷ *And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will*

An unexpected tornado destroys your house. . . A spouse dies suddenly . . . You've just been told your child was in a severe car accident . . . Your doctor informs you that you have terminal cancer. . . These are just a few examples of unexpected suffering that God may allow in our lives.

When we aren't personally experiencing these things, it is easy for us to say: "Just pray and put your hope in God." And this is certainly not bad advice. Last Sunday we learned that our hope in God's love and deliverance is a powerful thing - giving us the ability to get through even the toughest of times.

But trouble often catches us off guard. Our minds are a mess - mixed with a thousand different emotions and thoughts. We might pray, but we also might forget to pray. We might want to pray, but the pain we feel is keeping us from finding the right words or knowing exactly what we should pray for . . . We are an emotional wreck and need help. We need someone who is there, someone who is able to listen to the words we can't speak, and feel the emotions we are neither able to express nor understand. We need someone who can actually help: someone who will carry us to where we need to be and speak to God on our behalf.

And here is the blessed thing you need to know, dear Christian: You already have Him whom you need. He has been with you ever since your baptism - always ready to listen and help. Sadly, we often forget that He is there.

With St. Paul as our guide, let us find comfort for difficult times by learning about: **Our Great Prayer Partner**. 1) *He knows what to pray for.* 2) *God listens to his prayers.*

Part One: He knows what to pray for.

Our sermon text is a continuation of last week's sermon, where we learned that both creation and we ourselves groan under sin's curse. God tells us that we can expect suffering on this earth, but just as a pregnant woman's suffering is a sign that something wonderful is coming, so also our suffering as Christians is a sign that our deliverance and glory will soon be born. Yes, we groan in this world, but we groan in hope - eagerly waiting Christ's coming.

But what about the situations I described: when things get so bad that we seem to forget about our Christian hope because of the mess of emotions swirling in our head?

St. Paul tells: *"In the same way, 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."* (Romans 8:26, NIV84)

Just as God's promises sustain us when we remember to grab hold of them in faith, so also the Holy Spirit Himself sustains us when we are too weak or confused to think straight. We don't know what we should pray for, but thankfully the Holy Spirit does. He, the almighty and all-knowing third person of the Trinity, not only sees our problems and empathizes with us, he also knows exactly what we need. He has been our silent helper ever since the day we were baptized – guiding us through life by the power of his Word. He always had his arm around us through every bad time – directing our thoughts to God's Word and His promises. Through thick and thin the Holy Spirit has been continually pointing us to Christ and the forgiveness, life and salvation we have through faith in him. Even though we often don't feel his presence, He has always been there (everyday and all day) to bless, protect, guide, and pray for us.

Yes, not only does the Holy Spirit know what we are feeling and going through (even when we can't make sense of it ourselves), He also helps us in our weakness. Picture a person trying to carry a load that is too heavy for him. Along comes his buddy (who happens to be a body-builder) and, facing him, helps him lift the heavy load and carry it away. This is what God wants us to picture when we think of how the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness: He helps us bear our burden.

And how does He do that? By praying on our behalf - bringing not only our thoughts and emotions to God, but His own loving thoughts as well. He sighs and groans with us –asking God the Father to do what is best and, if it involves us going through some difficult times, to give us the strength we need to endure to the end.

And the groans the Holy Spirit uses are such that words cannot express them. Our finite mind cannot even begin to grasp how wonderfully the Holy Spirit prays for us because He expresses himself to God the Father in ways that go far beyond our understanding. But we can be sure that everything the Holy Spirit prays for us is meant to benefit us and draw us closer to God in love.

Part Two: God listens to his prayers.

St. Paul continues: *"And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit."* That which is incomprehensible to us, is perfectly clear to God the Father who both sees the troubled faith in our hearts and knows the Holy Spirit's will. And how do we know that the Father knows what the Spirit wants and listens to Him? Because He is of the same essence with the Spirit. He is the one true God, together with the Son and the Holy Spirit. Having the Holy Spirit interceding on our behalf is like having one of the justices of the US Supreme Court argue our case on our behalf in front of his colleagues - only better. Why better? Because the justices on the Supreme Court are not always on the same pages with each other; but the three persons of the Trinity are always in perfect agreement with one another, as the last verse of our text indicates: *"because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."*

The Holy Spirit only desires what the Father desires, and the Father desires only what the Spirit desires. Each person of the Trinity is perfectly united with the others in thought, and they work together to accomplish their will. You can see this intimate union at creation, when God the Father consulted with the other members of the Trinity by saying: *"Let us make man in our image."* (Genesis 1:26, NIV84) You can see this unity expressed in Jesus' words : *"For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me."* (John 6:38, NIV84)

And here is where the wonderful comfort comes in: every member of the Trinity desires our salvation. A few verses after our text (v.34), we read that even Jesus - God's Son - intercedes on our behalf. The whole Trinity is united in it's love for us, and this is why we know that God the Father will listen to the Spirit and they, together with the Son, will deliver us according to their gracious plan and time frame.

How wonderful it is to know that God listens to the Holy Spirit's intercessions on our behalf. How wonderful it is to know that God cares for us so deeply that He will come to our aid – delivering us from every evil attack and bringing us safely to His heavenly kingdom (cf. 2 timothy 4:18). He may not do what we want him to do, but we can rest assured that He will do what ever is best for us - whatever will build our reliance and faith on His Son.

There are two other things we should note about the Holy Spirit interceding on our behalf. Firstly, just because the Holy Spirit prays for us doesn't mean that we don't have to pray ourselves. The Holy Spirit wants to "help" us in our weakness - not take everything over while we lie down in a hammock, drink a couple Mai Tai's and watch. True, He does all the heavy lifting, but He also wants us to be just as concerned about our salvation as He is, and pray to God just as little children might run to their Father for help.

The other thing to note is that the Holy Spirit doesn't just talk to God on our behalf, He also comforts us on behalf of God. As we read and recall Scripture, the Holy Spirit directs our hearts to God's wonderful promises. He admonishes us when we stray, and comforts us with Christ's forgiveness when we come back. In everything, He points us to Jesus and the sacrifice He made of the cross for our sins. Jesus death and resurrection are our assurance that God loves us and will keep his promise to deliver us into his eternal kingdom.

When disaster strikes, and you don't know what to feel, pray or do, remember that the Holy Spirit is with you - empathizing with you and praying on your behalf. He knows what you need, and God will listen to His prayer. Why? Because God agrees with everything the Spirit says. Amen.