*All Things Work Together for Good* Homecrest PC

*Genesis 29:15-28* and *Romans 8:26-39* 7/30/17

 On December 20th, 2014, NYPD officers Wen-Jian Liu and Rafael Ramos were out on their routine patrol out in Bedford-Stuyvesant. After getting their lunch from a local Chinese restaurant, they went back into their patrol vehicle to eat their lunch while they kept an eye on the neighborhood in which they were assigned to. They could’ve eaten their lunch inside the restaurant, but they chose to sit in their vehicle instead. A man who came all the way from Virginia was on a mission to kill as many police officers as he could, approached the patrol vehicle and began opening fires point-blank, killing both officers almost instantaneously. This chilling, hideous, and tragic murder not only grabbled the media headlines nationwide, but it also captured the hearts of millions of everyday New Yorkers like you and me. The city has lost two of its own finest officers who were just doing their job while protecting the people of the city whom they loved.

It has been two and a half years since. Both families are still in the process of healing from the grief and the loss of their son and their father, but somehow life must go on. Time may ease the pain just a little, but not our memories. Earlier this week, a couple of NYPD officers came knocking at the door of officer Liu’s parents, who lived not far from here on Ave. T and West 6th Street. The officers requested that the parents go with them to the hospital to see their newborn granddaughter. What? What granddaughter?!? How could this be? Was this some kind of a joke, but it was not!

6 lb. 13 oz. Angelina Liu was brought into this world thanks to artificial insemination of officer Liu’s widow. She was conceived out of the sperms that were extracted from the slain officer Wen-Jian Liu the moment before his death. According to the parents of officer Liu, this little surprise surely brought much closure and healing while opening a new chapter for their family. Life must move on! Indeed it must!

Thanks be to God that there is redemption and grace in the midst of all seeming human tragedy. As our text today earlier reminded us that **all things must work together for good for those who love God, and who are called according to his purpose.** The Liu family can now focus upon carrying on the legacy that their son has left behind - a life that was tragically cut short. They must tell Angelina the story of her father, even though she has never met him.

 Come to think of it, many of us have also faced human tragedy and had our share of losses and disappointments in life, whether through losses of loved ones, losses of employments, broken and failed relationships…etc. etc. The list could go on and on and on. Whenever tragic event strikes or when things do not work out according to our plan or desire, how often and how quickly that we turn our blame on God for failing to meet OUR expectation? Instead of placing our trust in our sovereign God, we blame God for allowing bad things to happen, while failing to acknowledge God for all the good things that God has blessed us with.

For those who came to watch the movie over at the manse yesterday, we talked about this very same topic of how our sovereign God works before us, behind us, and all around us, in spite of the seeming human tragedy and disappointment in our lives. **We quickly come to realize our human vulnerability and fragility of life and that God is God and we are not.** We come to acknowledge that ultimately God is still in control of all things. Evil may persist a little while longer in this world but ultimately the Good will prevail over evil.

As our text reminded us earlier, through Paul’s writing to the church in Rome that *all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God’s purpose.[[1]](#footnote-1)* Paul was writing to groups of Christians who were facing many forms of persecution simply because of their professed faith in Christ.

Before we go any further, let us pause for a moment here and think about that? None of us here in this room right now can fathom what it was like when our lives are at stake due to our faith or our beliefs. For many Christians, to believe in Christ is a matter of life and death. You and I can wear any symbol of our faith (such as a cross) out in public, pray out loud and read the Bible and not face any serious consequences to our lives. Unfortunately that is not the case in many parts of the world today. Many Christians are being arrested, executed and churches are being bombed or burnt down as they come to worship or gather to pray.

For Paul, despite having been imprisoned in numerous occasions, he was persistent in continuing to preach the gospel and encouraged his fellow believers to “keep on keeping on”. Keep running this race that God has set before us, because it is not us who are running it but God is also running alongside with us as well. We are never alone!

 As the Apostle Paul wrote to the early Christians in Rome, *“for I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor 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.”[[2]](#footnote-2)*

What a powerful statement of faith and encouragement that is, especially when facing against all odds, trials and challenges in life. Paul’s exemplary faith serves as our role model to see beyond our present earthly trials and challenges and even of our present life. Paul was willing to risk it all for Christ’s sake. ***To me, to live is Christ, to die is to gain,[[3]](#footnote-3)*** as Paul also wrote to the Philippians.

Imagine if we were put in Paul’s position, when trials and challenges come up into our lives, would we have easily given up our hope in Christ? Would we have succumbed to the forces of evil and temptations in this world that often drift us away from our relationship with God?

Also, as Steven read for us earlier from the Hebrew testament about the story of Jacob. If you recalled from our reading last week, Jacob was running away from his older brother Esau after Jacob had tricked his father into giving him the birthright blessing. Jacob was seeking refuge in his uncle Laban’s household. While he was there, Jacob fell in love with his uncle’s daughter Rachel, and he wanted to take Rachel as his wife in exchange for 7 years of service working in his uncle’s household.

But on the night of the wedding, he was tricked by his uncle Laban, into taking his other daughter (Leah) in as his wife instead. Talk about **what goes around comes around**…now Jacob was on the receiving end of a trickery by his own uncle. Despite being tricked by his uncle, Jacob ended up taking in both of Laban’s daughters (Leah and Rachel) as his wives, after working for his uncle for another 7 years, so altogether 14 years.

Perhaps this was all part of God’s plan of judgement upon Jacob for his own deception and trickery towards his own father and teaching him a humble lesson of redemption and grace… “*all things work together [at the end] for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”[[4]](#footnote-4)*

What about us? How often do we feel ANGRY at God and feeling disappointed with what we’ve been dealt with in life? **What could’ve, would’ve, but didn’t happen.** Is it fair for us to blame God for all the evils that are happening all around us while failing to appreciate what God has done and to recognize that **our sovereign God is all knowing, all powerful, and is still ultimately in control of all things in this universe and in our time?** Have we looked into all circumstances from God’s perspective instead of ours? Often times we tend to see and seek things out of our own interests while failing to seek the interests of God and of others. We worship other forms of gods that we shouldn’t have, including ourselves, our own achievement and our own success. We are more concerned about “**what is it for me?**” instead of how God may use us to achieve God’s purpose and mission at the end. That’s a very selfish attitude, don’t you think?

What if what we desire and hope for is NOT what’s according to God’s will at the end? **We must look beyond our own personal interests and allow room for God’s grace to take place under all circumstances**. For God has a better and brighter plan installed for each of us, in accordance to God’s timing. It’s impossible for us to know God as we discern God’s will each day and draw closer in relationship with Him.

 All of us are called into a relationship with God and with one another, under God’s grace and God’s sovereign plan. Our greatest challenge is to stay focus and not lose sight of God’s commission to us as Christ’s disciples. As Christ proclaimed that we are to **“*Abide in Him as He abides in us. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can we unless we abide in Him. He is the vine, we are the branches. Those who abide in Him and He in us will bear much fruit, because apart from Him we can do nothing.[[5]](#footnote-5)***

Over the past couple of years, I’ve been updating you the health status of one of my friends (Joan) who has been battling with Stage IV (or perhaps now even Stage V) lung cancer in the past 5 years. Unfortunately, in the most recent weeks, her condition has rapidly deteriorated. I was glad that I had the opportunity to see her, perhaps for the one final time in April when I was out in California. Last week, after celebrating her 60th birthday, more than 100 days earlier, Joan was put under home hospice care while surrounded by her husband and with three of her sons.

Her cancer has spread to many other parts of her body, including her brain, her spine, and most critically her liver. However, in spite of all of this, her inspirational faith remains strong and as firm as ever. She realized that every moment is God’s moment and that God’s blessings in her life were to be witnessed and shared with others.

Joan shared openly about her diagnosis and how her faith has anchored her in seeing things through God’s perspective and not our human perspective. It is ultimately God’s will that is on display in our lives, as we turn our pages from one chapter to another in this epic story we call life. Whenever someone asked Joan about “what keeps you strong spiritually?” She would always proclaim that it is her faith that has sustained her and kept her encouraged and motivated, in overcoming all of her struggles and challenges for the past 5 years. She’s not afraid about what will happen, or how many more days that she might have…only God knows! All she knows is that God will be there with her to the end no matter what. She trusts that everything is in God’s hand. “*Nothing will separate her from the love of God in Christ Jesus her Lord*.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

We shall continue to pray for Joan and for Ron, her husband, and her three sons, who are taking on this courageous journey alongside with her until the end.

 As the Psalmist declared "***You have been my hope, Sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth. I will ever praise you.  I have become a sign to many; you are my strong refuge.  My mouth is filled with your praise, declaring your splendor all day long.  Do not be far from me, my God; come quickly, God, to help me.  As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more***."[[7]](#footnote-7)

 Whenever we feel that we are in a dump or at the far-away, remotest corner of the earth from God, God is only a simple prayer shout-out away. God can still hear our prayers and know what’s on our hearts.

 **Trust that somehow, someway God would turn something that seems horribly wrong and tragic into something that brings new life and new hope.** God knows us more than we know ourselves. God knows what’s on our mind and knows exactly what we need in order to overcome our various trials and challenges. The question is, ***do we have the faith to believe in what God can do through us?***

 Let us invite the Holy Spirit to speak to us once again…through Scripture and in our prayers. Open the doors of our stubborn hearts, be attentive in listening to God and to others before speaking or taking action, and most of all, be faithful and obedient to what the Spirit has to say to us today and in the days ahead. Let us give thanks in all circumstances.

 In the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Romans 8:28* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Romans 8:38-39* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Philippians 1:21* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Romans 8:28* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *John 15:4-5* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Romans 8:39* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Psalm 71:5-14* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)