

“Here’s how the game ends!” by Pastor Steve Sommerer
8th Sunday after Pentecost July 26, 2020

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The sermon text is from Romans 8:28-39. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified. This is our text.

Finally, this week the baseball season is with us again. And even with empty stands and fake crowd noise, there’s something about the great American game. The voice of Jack Buck became the soundtrack of summer when I was growing up as we listened to the Cardinals’ radio broadcast working outside or playing in the front yard. The radio is still my preferred way of enjoying a game.

As a Cardinal fan, of course, you get used to playing meaningful games late into the year, and radio makes me less anxious, because I can always do something else. Watching games on TV, especially playoff and World Series games, I get mad with each walk or weep over each error or strikeout. The panic attack makes it less fun.

There is another way of watching ball games I’ve found peaceful, and that is waiting till after the game has been played, and then, when I know my team has won, I can go back and watch the whole thing – even the nail-biting, high-pressure moments with the calm and satisfaction that in the end, things will turn out the right way. That I won’t have wasted 3 hours to finish heartbroken. For you hardcore fans, that might seem pretty lame, but I prefer the comfort and certainty to the potential letdown.

Today, I want to talk about an important Christian doctrine that usually gets mentioned in passing, the doctrine or teaching of Predestination, or God’s Election of Grace. The last few weeks we’ve been listening to parables in our Gospel lesson, about a Sower God who spreads His seed far and wide, a parable about an enemy who sowed weeds after God the Sower planted good seed, and today we hear a parable about a Fisher God who drops His net and catches the bad with the good and sorts them in the judgment.

Predestination or Election of Grace is the Scriptural teaching that God chose His believers in Christ before the foundations of the world and appointed the means by which they would hear the Gospel call and be converted to faith by the power of the Holy Spirit to believe in Jesus’ death and resurrection for all sins and every sinner. And our text says, *“Those whom God predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified.”* That is to say in God’s Election of Grace Jesus is the Author and Perfecter of our faith, leaving nothing undone, nothing to chance from the sowing of the seed of the Word until the Day we are gathered in God’s final harvest. In today’s Gospel, He drops the net and at the end of days gathers it home.

Among the things God's Word teaches with unmistakable certainty: It's certain God wants all people to be saved... after all, the Sower sowed seed everywhere. The fisher dropped the net and caught good and bad. 2 Peter 3 says, "*God is patient, **not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance.***" God's grace is for all. 2 Corinthians 5 says, "*Christ died **for all.***" John 3 says, "*God so loved **the world** that He gave His only-begotten Son.*"

Not only does God want everyone saved, it's also true, everyone who is saved is saved by God's grace alone... 100% God's work and gift. Acts 13 says, "*All who were appointed to eternal life believed.*" Ephesians 2 says, "*It's by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is a gift of God, not by works.*" Our OT lesson from Deuteronomy 7 says, "*God chose you to be a people for His treasured possession, not because you were more in number... but because the Lord loves you.*"

God knows everything in advance, the good and bad, but that's not predestination. Everything about you down to the hairs of your head are known in the heart of God. The Psalmist said that our God who saw your unformed body knows every day marked out for you. God isn't the source of evil or suffering, but the Bible teaches that our All-Knowing God has set the boundaries beyond which no evil can pass, no Covid disease or physical malady. Romans 8 says this world is in the pains of childbirth waiting for judgment day, but even the worst sufferings "*for those who love God all things work together for good, for those called according to His purpose.*" No virus or earthly evil is bigger than God, so that's where you should put your fear, love and trust – in Him above all things.

We humans hear that God wants all to be saved, and all who are saved are saved by grace alone... and we start making our mental calculations. Why some and not others? It has been called the crux theologorum or the cross of theology. Why some are saved and not others is only a problem, because we humans have a hard time letting God give the answer, and then waiting for Him to reveal His wisdom when we get to heaven.

Some Bible teachers would argue against Deut.7... "Well, if God chose Israel, there must have been some reason in them." But Moses holds out the stop sign: "*It's not because you were more in number... but because the Lord loves you.*" Some will say, surely God foresaw something in that person, some lesser guilt or higher virtue, or even that God saw one day you'd believe. But God tells us our Election to salvation or Predestination happened in Christ "*before the creation of the world.*" God did not look for and find the good in you, but by His predestinating power He called to faith, justified and will one day glorify His Elect, His chosen ones.

Sadly, other theologians, like John Calvin, actually taught against the whole weight of Holy Scripture that God predestined some to salvation, and others He predestined from eternity to be damned. In Calvin's opinion, Jesus didn't actually die for the world, but only believers. But the Bible says "That's not so!" It's not God's will that some will go to hell. He could have sown the seed in only a few places, but God sent the Gospel to be preached to all nations. Jesus said, "*How I longed to gather your children as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.*"

Someone going to hell isn't God's fault. Ezekiel says, "[The Lord] *takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that they turn from their ways and live.*" Scripture's answer is uncomplicated **if you choose to take God at His Word instead of relying on human reason.** That's where most get tripped up. If we are saved, it is "to

God be the glory great things He has done.” If we’re lost, it’s our own fault. That’s the Bible’s teaching. In Ephesians 1, Paul says, “*God made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Christ.*” If it seems mysterious now, don’t let it trouble you, just believe what God says.

In eternity, you’ll no longer “*know in part and see in part, but know fully*” 1 Corinthians 13 says. So how do you know if you’re predestined? Well, the last place you should look is into the hidden heart of God. God is too big to be put under your microscope. You also shouldn’t look into God’s Law, because when you look there, you’ll notice that there’s not one thing that makes you better or more deserving or more worthy than anyone else. “*All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*”, and hell is what you’ve all earned. Still less should you go looking into your happy experiences or your wonderful willpower and resolve or some mountaintop religious moment, as though you’re ok because you know you were saved at some point in time.

The Bible only teaches Predestination in one direction, unto salvation. We teach it because it’s Biblical, and it’s a doctrine of perfect hope and comfort. But you must use it rightly. Used wrongly someone might fall into despair, unsure of whether or not they are God’s Elect Child. Used wrongly someone might think: what’s it matter what I do or think; if I’m Elect it’ll go however it goes, even if I live like a loser.

The right way to think about it is this: you don’t have to sit through the anxious moments of life’s game, fearful or depressed, living in terror of the outcome. I like knowing the final score before I waste three hours watching a ballgame.

With your Predestination to salvation, you don’t have to pry into God’s hidden mind. God tells you “*You are more than conquerors through Christ who loved you.*” Neither angels nor demons can change that, “*Nothing can separate you from the love of Christ.*” If you can hear God’s invitation this morning, do not doubt that God will never lie or mislead you. In your Baptism, God poured a promise over your head that had nothing to do with your goodness or deserving. When you come to the Lord’s Supper, Jesus Christ Himself says, “*This My Body and Blood are given for you for the forgiveness of your sins.*” God doesn’t lie. He never has. He never will. The God who calls you to faith in Christ is the same God who justifies you through faith, and that very same God who became the firstborn from the dead will glorify you when He bodily raises you on the Last Day. From beginning to end, your salvation is securely written in Jesus, the Book of Life.

So don’t worry and don’t live in fear. You know the final score. Jesus wins. The devil has lost. “*Because He lives, you will live also.*” Life has anxious moments. Maybe for you that’s Covid 19 or starting school online or whatever it is, each day has enough troubles of its own. But God has you in His hand. Nothing you face today is bigger than God or beyond His ability to work “*all things for good.*” The God who predestines you in Christ has your earthly life **and your eternal future** in His control. The game is over and in Jesus you are the winner, so even if you can’t always enjoy the game of life, or even if it brings trials and heartaches, “*Have no fear, little flock, your Father has chosen to give you the Kingdom.*” Amen.

And now may the peace of God which surpasses human understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.