

THE FESTIVAL OF THE HOLY TRINITY June 2, 5 & 6, 2004
St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI

In These Uncertain And Troubling Times, We Have An Amazing God!

Terrorists are in place and poised to attack the United States sometime this summer. That is the message that our government conveyed to us within the past several weeks. We have been told that we can expect some sort of incident to happen. Where? No one knows. What are they going to do? Set off a dirty nuclear bomb? Use poison gas? Fly another plane into a skyscraper? We haven't the slightest idea. When? No one has the foggiest notion. But we want everyone to be aware that if something happens, we can't blame our leaders for not alerting us to the real possibility of such an attack.

How did that message affect you? One of our members who serves as a chaperone for the Lakeside Lutheran High School band made the comment that some band member parents were concerned because the band this summer will be traveling out east and will be in New York City. They were naturally anxious because of what happened on September 11th in New York City and now their children were going to be in that same city when we are being told that we can expect that something will happen this summer in the U.S.

We have also been told that Americans are obese and we are eating ourselves into life threatening diseases and death. We are told that there is an increase in the number of cases of type two diabetes. We are seeing more people have heart problems because of their weight and the list goes on.

We are also being told that just about everything you eat can cause cancer and kill you.

Is it any wonder that many people are scared to death? They are frightened of others. They are afraid to go out, to travel or do anything.

What is a Christian's perspective of supposed terrorist attacks, of diseases that may strike us and of all the troubles and uncertainties that each of us faces in our own lives? Today as we celebrate the Festival of the Holy Trinity, the Apostle Paul helps us to get a handle on our lives in this world and on everything that continues to happen all around us. Paul reminds us that **IN THESE TROUBLING AND UNCERTAIN TIMES, WE HAVE AN AMAZING GOD!** In his great concern and love the apostle has us focus on the work of each of the three persons of the Holy Trinity, our God and Lord. Paul writes, **I) The Spirit Helps Us. II) The Father Works All For Our Good and III) We Are Being Conformed To The Likeness Of The Son.**

THE SPIRIT HELPS US

How many times have you been facing a situation where you had no idea what God's will was or what you should do? At such times you may even have had difficulty in knowing what you should pray for. Fortunately at such times you and I are not alone. The Holy Spirit who dwells in each of us and whom we received in our baptisms prays in our behalf. Listen to what Paul writes, "In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We don't know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. 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." (Vv. 26-27) Isn't that great to know that when we aren't sure what we should be asking for the Spirit is asking everything that we need in accordance with God's will?

We are not helpless in this world. We have received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Our bodies are the temple of God's Spirit. When we face uncertain times and difficult situations and choices and the Holy Spirit is right there praying in our behalf and seeking what is best for us and what is in accord with God's will.

THE FATHER WORKS ALL FOR OUR GOOD

But there is more. Our God is awesome in his activity. Paul now turns our attention to the work of God the Father. Whatever happens in our lives as followers of Jesus Christ, God always works them all for our good. That is hard to believe at times. When a person is afflicted with cancer and is enduring great pain and suffering, how can you say that is for that person's good? When a Christian's home is struck by a tornado and all they have is ruined or destroyed, how can you say that is for their good? It is because God says so and God doesn't lie to us. Listen to what Paul writes, "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." (v. 28)

As you read the pages of the Bible you see example after example of how God worked all things for the good of those whom he chose and who loved him. Think of Joseph. Here was a man who was favored by his father over his brothers. His brothers hated him and plotted to kill him. Instead they sold him into slavery and then told their father that Joseph must have been attacked by wild animals and eaten alive. How these sons must have hated Joseph to allow their father to believe that his favorite son was dead and gone. Do you think that Joseph was saying, "All this is for my good as he was sitting in the dried out cistern wondering what his brothers were going to do to him or while the slave traders took him to Egypt? We know that in Egypt he was sold to an Egyptian government official who soon placed Joseph in charge of his entire household. But Joseph faced another trouble. The man's wife had her designs on Joseph and attempted to seduce him. When she invited Joseph into her bed, he said, "How can I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9b) Joseph ran out of the house, but she grabbed his cloak and screamed. She told her husband that Joseph tried to rape her and Joseph ended up in prison for doing what was right in God's eyes. Do you think at this time, Joseph is saying, "All this is for my good"? We know that eventually Joseph was released because of his ability to interpret dreams. The King of Egypt made Joseph the Prime Minister of Egypt. When the famine hit that part of the world there was food in Egypt, Jacob sent his sons to buy food and they met Joseph. Joseph sold food to his family and eventually he brought them all to Egypt to live. When Jacob died, the brothers were afraid that Joseph was finally going to even the score. So they went to him and said that their father had said before he died that Joseph should forgive his brothers. Joseph was saddened by their request. By now Joseph was able to look back over his entire life and say to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." (Genesis 50:20) There are times when you and I are able to look back and then see the good that has come. There are other times when we don't have that benefit and yet we know that our God has a purpose and it does all work for our good.

Paul now goes on to show what good God has already accomplished in our lives. Paul reminds us, "And those he predestined he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." (v. 30) In eternity before God had even created this world, he elected or predestined us to be adopted as his children and to spend eternity with him in glory. Isn't that amazing? Before anything was ever-created God personally elected you and me to be with him forever? Why? It's called grace. This is the amazing love of our God. It had nothing to do with you and me but it has everything to do with our loving God. Then in time God called us. He called you and me to trust in Jesus as our Savior. For many of us that happened when we were baptized as infants. For others of us it occurred when we heard the Word of God and the Holy Spirit brought us to faith. Having been called to faith, we have been justified. You and I know where we stand in the judgment. We know we will hear our Judge Jesus say to us, "Come you who are blessed by my Father take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." (Matthew 25:34) God has pronounced us not guilty. We are innocent of all of our sins. Paul concludes with the truth that we are glorified. You and I are not perfect and holy yet. We are in process. But one day we will be holy just as Jesus Christ is right now. God will do that for us also. When you see all the good that God has already done and accomplished in your life, then you can more readily say as I struggle in this world and endure temptation, strife and heartaches, I know that my heavenly Father is also going to work all this for my good too.

WE ARE BEING CONFORMED TO THE LIKENESS OF HIS SON

You and I are also being conformed to the likeness of Christ. We have been made sisters and brothers of our Savior Jesus. As Paul writes, “For those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” (v. 29) Jesus holds the highest position in the family of God. As the Bible says, “Therefore God exalted him the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”(Philippians 2:9-11) Now what does it mean to be conformed to Christ’s likeness? Jesus went through suffering, pain, rejection, scorn and death. We can expect that our lives will not be without sorrow, pain, persecution and rejection. Remember Jesus said, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.” (John 15:20b)

Why was the Son Jesus persecuted? He was the almighty God and people hated him and rejected him because he pointed out their sins to them and called them to repent. Jesus was also persecuted and executed so that he might rescue and deliver those who hated and rejected him as well as all the people of this earth. Jesus went through greater suffering and pain than you and I ever will. He suffered the torments of hell, the punishment of our sins. He did that so that we might be free – free from the accusations and threats of the devil; free from the eternal punishment that we deserve for our failure to be perfect; and free to serve God without fear all the days of our lives.

Our entire lives are ones where God is fashioning and conforming us so that we are more and more like our Savior Jesus. That is why what happens to you and what happens to me always has a purpose and reason and always works for our good. For God is conforming us to the likeness of Jesus. We are becoming more loving; kind, understanding, patient, forgiving and we could go on with the many characteristics of our Savior that God is shaping and developing in our lives.

Now what is our Christian attitude as we face terrorist attacks, uncertainty of health, the troubles and problems of life? God is in control and he has a reason for all that is happening and it is all working for our good. For we have an awesome God. The Spirit prays in our behalf. The Father works all for our good. The Son rescued us and we are being conformed to his likeness.

Amen.