

**More Than Victorious:
July 26, 2026**

So typically I choose to focus...
On the gospel lesson...
When I prepare a sermon.

Cause you know...
Jesus.

My mom asks me...
What are you preaching about this week...
And I say... Jesus...
And she says... Jesus again?
Yes Jesus again.

But there are two factors...
That made me choose... **[1 Romans]**
The second lesson for today.
The Epistle... which by the way...
Just means letter.

The reasons are:

First. I preached on the parables...
That we have from Jesus...
During Lent.
That was just a little bit ago...
I didn't want to do a recent repeat.

Secondly... there are FOUR phrases...
In that Romans lesson...
That I think deserve attention.
Because they are confusing.
They are theologically complicated...

Or at the very least...
Theologically challenging.

So. That's what I'm going to do today.
I'm going to do...
Four little mini-sermons...
Centered on Romans 8: 26-39.

And so it begins.

Art and Ada Frick.
Sounds like I'm swearing...

But I'm not. These are the names of...
The art teachers at Wartburg College.
Back in 1980... something.

I was taking a class called Art Education...
About teaching kids... how to create...
And express themselves...
And appreciate...

You know. Art.

We were given a blank sheet of paper...
And told to draw something specific...
I can't remember exactly what I drew...
But I remember what I did... **[2 Art]**

I drew what I wanted to draw...
In the bottom right hand corner...
Of this very large sheet of paper.
And I liked it.
I was done.
So I handed in my work.

Both Art and Ada... said no...
You have to draw more...
You have to fill the entire space...
The whole piece of paper.

I said... I don't want to.
I did what I wanted to do...
And now... I'm done.

They said... I should not do art...
Because I didn't understand...
What I was supposed to do.
How art works.

So what I heard them say to me... was...
You do not know...
How to create... as you ought.

Fast forward... many years later...
I was in pastoral ministry...

And I was asked to pray at an event. **[3 Prayer]**
On the spot.
I had a professor at seminary...
Who called this... "thinking on your feet"...

And at the beginning of class...
Every once in a while...
He would call on one of us to pray.

The day it happened to me...
He said... Oh Pastor Rod...
So glad you could make it...
To our 50th wedding anniversary...

Would you please stand up and say a prayer.
So I did...in front of the whole class...

You know...
It's what pastors do.

So... I was asked to pray over an event...
At the church I was serving... in reality...
I said a simple and clear prayer.

Then a woman... who later became...
A significant thorn in my side...
Which is a nice way of saying...
A pain in my posterior...
She came up to me and said...

You know... you really aren't good at praying.
I hope you get better.

See she came from a more fundamental tradition...
And had much greater expectations...
I guess I didn't say...
Lord... I just wanna...
Quite enough to satisfy her.

Anyway... what I heard her saying to me...
And what I took to heart was...
I did not know... how to pray...
As I ought.

And you know what I say...
To the art teachers who say...
I don't know how to art...
The way that I ought...

And the judgmental woman...
Who says I don't know how to pray...
The way that I ought...

I say... DING DONG... you're wrong.

And even if she were right.
About knowing or not knowing...
How to pray...

The apostle Paul addresses this issue directly.
In the book of Romans Chapter 8 verse 26... **[4 Dear God]**
He says... even when we don't know...
How to pray as we ought...

The Holy Spirit intercedes for us...
With groans too deep for words.

So my first point is...
You don't have to worry...
About whether or not...
You're saying the right thing.

It's not our job... to impress God...
With our fancy flowery words...
Or our incredibly insightful thoughts...
Or even our air-tight theology.

God does not care... about all that.

Just like a parent...
Doesn't expect a 3 yo child...
To be able to change the oil in the car...
Or figure out taxes...
Or get a job.

That's how God sees us.
We are children.
We don't know.
We don't have the long view... that God has.
We don't the wisdom... that we need.

We don't have the words...
That will impress other people...
Or somehow manipulate God...
And force God...
To grant our wishes.

That's not it... not at all.

It's a relationship... based on love. **[5 Good Father]**
And that's exactly what Jesus was teaching us...
Back in Matthew 7: 7-11. When he said...

Ask, and it will be given you;
Search, and you will find; knock,
And the door will be opened for you.

Is there anyone among you who,
If your child asks for bread, will give a stone?
Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake?

If you then, who are evil,
Know how to give good gifts to your children,
How much more will your Father in heaven
Give good things to those who ask him!

In other words...
Jesus encourages us...
To talk to God... best we can.

But. With that said.
There is also the idea...
That we can grow in our faith.
And grow in our spiritual practice.
And just grow...
Into God's family.

That's why Paul wrote the next part... Chapter 8 verse 28...
About how all things work together for good...
For those who love God.

Now... people hear that verse...
And say... wait one minute...
Bad stuff happens to me...
All the time...

Now Paul is telling me...
That I'm supposed to think... and feel...
Like that bad stuff that happens to me...
Is really something good for me.

I saw a sign at the Jesus store... aka Hobby Lobby... **[6 Bears]**
And it said... what doesn't kill you...
Makes you stronger.
Except bears.
Bears will kill you.

So we need to be honest...
About the difficult things in our lives.
God has never asked us to pretend...
Like every little thing... is a-ok.

We can be honest.

But THIS goes on... to verse 8:29...
And says... those whom God foreknew...
Hold on... if God is omniscient... knows everything...
Then God knows... if you believe or not... right?

Paul is saying... when we believe...
Then we are... predestined to be conformed... **[7 Conformed]**
To the image of God's Son.

So let's break that all down... it means...
All things... are working together...
In our lives... as part of God's plan...
To make us more like Jesus.
To be conformed to who he is.

Not to get what we want.
Or to make life easy.

This is about growing into Jesus.

And yes... everything contributes...
To that growth.

Just like Jesus... suffered and died...
Just like Jesus... laughed and cried...
Just like Jesus... lived this human life...
And everything that happened to him...
Drew him closer to God.

Same thing is supposed to happen to us.
All things... happen to us... with the idea...
That we will grow in our faith...
And rely more and more on God...

The Spirit draws us closer to God.

We will sing praises and give thanks in the good times.
We will cry out in times of suffering and need.
And sometimes... in this human experience...
We will even ask God...
Where are you?

Just like Jesus did.

And through this living... all this living...
We will grow... and be conformed...
Into his image.

Now. If you come into my office...
I have a coaster... for my drinks...
And it indeed... has seen better days...
But it was a gift... so it's staying right where it is. **[8 Favorite]**

It says... Jesus loves you...
But I'm his FAVORITE.

There is a game we play in our family.
As you know... we have five daughters...
And all five claim to be my favorite.

They whisper to me...
I know... I am your favorite.

And you know what...
They are.

I love them all... for incredibly different reasons.

Some of them are type A...
And very successful in their careers.

Some are wise and see answers...
To questions and problems... that I think are beautiful.

Some are adventurous and do things...
That I wish I would have done...
When I was their age.

And all of them.
Every single one of them...
Have soft loving hearts.
Are kind beyond my hope.
Are good and decent people.

And each one... is my favorite.
And each one has my unending love.
And I would be there in a heartbeat...
For each one... if they asked.

That is exactly what Paul is saying...
In Romans 8:33...

He asks a rhetorical question...
Who can bring any charge...
Against God's elect?

The word elect... has some alternative interpretations...
In the Greek.
It can mean..
Elect. Select. Chosen.
Or... my favorite...
FAVORITE.

Who can bring any charge...
Against God's favorites?

And see... this is how it works with God...
I mean... the way you know... **[9 God's Favorite]**
You are God's favorite...
Is because of what God has done... for you.

That's what it says.
God is on your side.

And logically... God...
Who did not withhold...
Even his own Son...
But gave him up...
For all of us...

Won't that same God...
Give us everything else?

Well of course.
God will give you what you really need...
Because... you are God's FAVORITE.

All of you... are God's favorite.
And if God is for us... then who can be against us.

Which leads the last interesting quote...
From Romans Chapter 8:37...

Paul writes... **[10 More Than]**
We are more than victorious...
Through him who loved us.

How can that be?
There is nothing more than victorious...

I mean... we live this life...
Like there is nothing more...
Than being victorious.

We go to war...
And we fully intend to win.

We interview for a job...
And we expect to beat out...
All the other candidates...
To get the job.

We root for the home team...
And get really excited...
When they win...
And really upset...
When they lose.

And so many times...
We judge our own lives...
In terms of success or failure.

Sometimes... we even compare ourselves...
To other people...
Which the commercial world...
Wants us to do...

So buy more stuff.
Get better stuff.
Be better people.

Keep up... with the Jones...

What if there is more than being victorious?
What if whether we win or lose...
We belong to God. Period.

Or the way... Paul writes a little later....
In this same letter of Romans...
Chapter 14... he writes... **[11 We are the Lord's]**

We do not live to ourselves,
And we do not die to ourselves.

If we live, we live to the Lord,
And if we die, we die to the Lord;

So then, whether we live or die,
We are the Lords.

We belong to Jesus.
Whether we win or lose.
Whether we succeed or fail.
Whether we are happy or sad.
Whether we are whole or broken.
Whether we are this or that...
Fill in your own words.

No matter what...
The current condition of our life.

No matter what...
The current circumstances of the world.

No matter what... we are the Lord's.

And there is nothing....
That has the power... to change that.

It is indestructible.
It is undeniable.
It is nonrefundable.

We are the Lord's.
We belong to Jesus.

So that makes us...
More than victorious.
Victorious doesn't even matter anymore.
It becomes completely irrelevant.

We are beyond victorious.

We are loved.
We are claimed.
We are his.
Forever.
No matter what.
Thanks be to God.
Amen!