

Sermon for August 9, 2026 – 11th Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 8:28–30 EHV

Theme: **Christians Rest in God's Plan for Them in Christ.**

- 1) He uses all things for the believer's good.
- 2) He uses His plan to bring them into glory.

²⁸ *We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose,* ²⁹ *because those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers.* ³⁰ *And those he predestined, he also called. Those he called, he also justified. And those he justified, he also glorified.*

Have you ever heard someone say: “Don’t worry, God’s got a plan,” after some tragedy upended your life? They said it to cheer you up. Did it? When it was said to me, I thought: “I’m happy that God has a plan, but what is it? My life’s in shambles and I don’t see a way out. How can I set my heart at rest?”

“Don’t worry, God’s got a plan” – at first glance, this statement seems cliched, offering little help. But the Biblical truth behind this statement is full of divine comfort and hope. Let us consider this truth, under the theme: **Christians Rest in God's Plan for Them in Christ.** 1) He uses all things for the believer's good. 2) He uses His plan to bring them into glory.

Part One: He uses all things for the believer's good.

Right before our sermon text, the Apostle Paul wrote about how the Holy Spirit helps believers in their weakness. Even when suffering is so great that we don't know what to pray for, the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf – asking God to help us in accordance with His will.

Paul invites us to trust that God will answer the Spirit's prayers on our behalf. He writes:

²⁸ *We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

Who are those who love God? They are believers in Jesus. Redeemed by the blood He shed for them on the cross, they repent of all sin and trust in Him alone for forgiveness. That is an important point to note: their love for God does not cause God to love them. No, the Bible is clear: *We love because he first loved us.*ⁱ Believers love God because He adopted them through the waters of Holy Baptism – washing them clean from all sin by connecting them to Christ through faith.ⁱⁱ

Regarding these people, the Apostle Paul states: *all things work together for good.* Think about what this means for you as a believer in Christ. The apostle doesn't say “some things,” or “good things,” or “non-sinful things” ... no, he says: “all things” work together for your good.

Do you believe this? Sadly, we rarely act like it. Like Elijah at the beginning of our first lesson,ⁱⁱⁱ we feel despondent when things don't turn out the way we think they should. As our hearts scream, "Why?", we begin to question God's wisdom in allowing what He allows. Instead of trusting God's clear promise to work in all things for our good, we doubt. We sin.

As Peter in our Gospel lesson sank into the sea when he let the wind and waves distract him from Jesus,^{iv} so the waves of doubt often overwhelm us during troubling times. Praise be to Christ that He doesn't let us drown. He grabs hold of us through His Word, calling us to repentance and faith. Jesus showed perfect love to His Father during troubling times for our sake – keeping God's law perfectly in our place. More than that, He died for our doubts on the cross – paying for our sins in full. It is finished; all your sins are forgiven in Christ. His resurrection proves it.

And because God did not spare his own Son but gave Him up for us all,^v we can believe *that all things work together for the good of those who love God*, including the downright painful and evil things you experience as a believer.

But how can terrible things serve our good? Even though the LORD, in His wisdom, hides the specific details of His plans from us, He nevertheless gives us every reason to believe His promise. The Bible is full of examples of people like Joseph, who told his repentant brothers who sold him into slavery, "*You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.*"^{vi}

Yes, even in the evil you experience as a Christian, God has a plan for you in Christ. He wants to conform you to the image of His Son. He wants you to share in His everlasting glory. He is working in all things to accomplish those goals.

Part Two: He uses His plan to bring them into glory.

St. Paul continues:

Those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers.

My father-in-law's hobby is woodworking. When he starts a project, he doesn't just take any old lump of wood. No, he ruminates on its colour, shape, grain, design – specially choosing the best pieces he wants for his project.

Does God do the same? While the LORD certainly considers every aspect of us more carefully than my father-in-law scrutinizes a piece of wood, He does not choose us because we are "the best fit" for His project. No, everyone the LORD chooses is as unfit for heaven as the next. Knowing our flaws and failures, He nevertheless chooses us in Christ to become like Christ: righteous and holy. He chooses us solely for His mercy's sake, to the glory of His grace:^{vii} so we can reflect His Son into the world, calling others to repentance and faith. Why does He want us to call others? Because He desires the everlasting death of no one. He wants everyone to repent and live.^{viii}

In another place, the Apostle Paul wrote: *This saying is trustworthy and worthy of full acceptance: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,” of whom I am the worst. But I was shown mercy for this reason: that in me, the worst sinner, Christ Jesus might demonstrate his unlimited patience as an example for those who are going to believe in him, resulting in eternal life.*^{ix}

Yes, Paul’s statement is worthy of your full acceptance and application. Like a warped and knotty piece of wood before a carpenter, your sins make you unworthy of God’s choice. Nevertheless, He chose you, dear Christian. From before creation, He planned how He would save you: by sending Jesus to live the perfect life you failed to live and suffer for your sins on the cross. Christ paid for every sin of yours in full. His resurrection proves it. It is finished. You are reconciled to God.

And God not only planned how He would save you in Christ, He planned how He would clothe you in Christ’s righteousness by faith so you would *be conformed to the image of His Son*

Therefore, Paul continues:

³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called.

Just as a sculptor begins carving the wood he selected after gathering everything he needs to execute his plan, so the LORD does with us. Like a piece of wood, we are passive – offering nothing to the Lord as He conforms us to the image of His Son. But unlike the wood, the Spirit makes us alive as He uses His tools of Word and Sacrament to create and strengthen faith in us – fashioning us to His design.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus calls us sheep who know and listen to their Shepherd’s voice^x - not because we are clever enough to pick Him out, but because He knew us first, called us by name, and laid down His life for us. God calls out to us through His Gospel. His saving love makes our unwilling hearts willing. We hear His voice and follow Him, even through the darkest of valley^{xi} – trusting He will work all things for our good.

Those he called, he also justified.

The word “justify” means to acquit – to declare free of all sin. The doctrine of justification is like a coin that has two sides. The first and most important side of justification is God’s Easter declaration of all sins being forgiven in Christ. It is finished. There is not a thing that anyone, anywhere in the world must do to be reconciled with God. Christ paid for the sins of the world in full. His resurrection proves it.

The second side of justification is that this verdict is received. The blessings of Christ’s sacrifice do not benefit us unless we receive them in faith. Even this faith is a product of God’s work in us through the Gospel and not our own choosing.

Allow me to illustrate what I mean: On September 2, 1945, representatives of the Japanese government signed the “Instrument of Surrender” treaty on the USS Missouri, establishing peace between the Allies and Japan.

Sadly, a few Japanese soldiers on remote islands did not believe the reports about the treaty. They continued to fight, and many of them died – not because the Allies hated them, but because they refused to believe the truth. But the Japanese soldiers who heard the news and believed it put down their weapons. They lived at peace with the allies.

Similarly, God's Gospel declares Himself at peace with humanity in Christ. Sadly, many people don't like the terms of this peace or refuse to believe it, leaving them at enmity with God. But those whom God calls to faith through the Gospel rejoice at the news of God's declaration. The Holy Spirit uses the very message of their acquittal in Christ to awaken faith in their hearts to receive it. They live at peace with God, confident He will fulfil His other promises.

And those he justified, he also glorified.

Because you, dear Christian, are at peace with God through faith in Jesus, the glory God intended for you from before creation is yours now.

“Now? How can that be? I still struggle with sin and experience all sorts of suffering. I grow weak and die. How can Paul say that God “glorified” us – past tense? Wouldn't it have been better to say that He will glorify us in the future?”

The reason Paul wrote what he wrote is that, in God's mind, your glory is as certain as if it had already happened. Just as a trust fund already belongs to a child before he comes of age to receive it, so the glory God prepared for you in Christ already belongs to you through faith – being kept safe for you in heaven.^{xii} We are merely waiting for the day Jesus will return to reveal it, as the apostle John once wrote: *See the kind of love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are!... Dear friends, we are children of God now, but what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he is revealed we will be like him, and we will see him as he really is.*^{xiii}

And this brings me back to the original question that started this sermon: where can you find rest when great trials come in your life? You don't find it in worrying or trying to create contingency plans to get yourself out of the mess. Rather, you find your rest in Jesus and the Father's promise that everything you experience in life is part of His plan to conform you to His Son's image. How? By clothing you in Christ's righteousness as you put your trust in Him – a trust that He Himself has created in your heart through His Gospel.^{xiv}

Faith in Christ is what makes Christians different in the world. Because of God's love for us in Christ, you can confess with the apostle Paul, *“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither things present nor things to come, nor powerful forces, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*^{xv}

Yes, dear Christian, regardless of what challenges face you in life, find rest in God's plan for you in Christ. He uses all things for your good. He uses His plan for you in Christ to bring you into glory. Amen.

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- ⁱ 1 John 4:19 EHV
 - ⁱⁱ Cf. Romans 6:3ff
 - ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. 1 Kings 19:4-10
 - ^{iv} Cf. Matthew 14:29-30
 - ^v Cf. Romans 8:32
 - ^{vi} Genesis 50:20 EHV
 - ^{vii} Cf. Ephesians 1:4-6
 - ^{viii} Cf. Ezekiel 18:32 & 1 Timothy 2:3-4
 - ^{ix} 1 Timothy 1:15-16 EHV
 - ^x Cf. John 10:14-16, 27-28
 - ^{xi} Cf. Psalms 23:3-4
 - ^{xii} Cf. 1 Peter 1:4
 - ^{xiii} 1 John 3:1a, 2 EHV
 - ^{xiv} Cf. Galatians 3:26-27
 - ^{xv} Romans 8:37-39 EHV