

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
August 2, 2020  
Sermon by Pastor Bart Brauer  
***God is praying for you***

—Romans 8:26-27

It was a weird summer evening in the Midwest. The sky turned an eerie shade of green and the air got dead calm. Just after 7:00, the village siren came on. Everyone within earshot knew what that meant: a tornado warning. My aunt was in her home on Second Street when her husband called to her from across the home and said, “You might as well come look at this.” She stepped to the back door, and there it was: a raging tornado just across the village, tearing apart the canning company and bearing down on their backyard and their home. After getting the view, they rushed down into the basement, and waited for the inevitable. My aunt thought: “This could be it. This could be the end of my life.” As the terrible sound approached, joined by the first loud noises of wood splitting and glass shattering above, all my aunt could do was get off a desperate prayer: “Lord, help!”

“Lord, help!” What do you think God does with a prayer like that? Very short. Little in the way of specifics. There wasn’t time to articulate: “Lord, spare my home. Lord, spare my life. Spare my church right across the street. Spare the people worshipping in that church this very moment.” There was no time for any of that. You might say, “Well, certainly God knew what was in her heart. He knew what she wanted to pray for.” But she didn’t even know all that was in her heart. Amidst the fear and the confusion, and quite frankly, the most basic concern for life and limb, sometimes the finest and best prayer we can offer under the circumstances is simply, “Lord, help!” What does God do to help us when in our weakness all we can do is cry for help?

There are two fascinating passages in Romans chapter 8 that address this very thing. The passages seem mysterious. Don’t get me wrong, they are clear. We can certainly understand what they are telling us. But they are a little mysterious because we would never imagine God does something like this if we didn’t hear it straight from him in his Word. Romans 8:26-27: *The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not 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.* Do you hear what God does? God prays for you. The mystery of it all brings up further questions: When does God do this? How does God do this? Why does God do this? We find answers to those questions by taking a close look at these words of God.

These two passages are part of the flow in a whole chapter of wonderful words from God. So it’s good for us to track Romans chapter 8 from where it starts.

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. God sent his Son to be a sin offering to free us from sin and death. We are not condemned. We are forgiven and free.

We walk and live according to the new spirit created within us, not according to the old sinful nature we were born with. Our old sinful nature means death. Our new spirit is life. And with God’s Spirit living within us, these dying bodies of ours will someday be raised from the dead, just like Christ was.

We are led by the Spirit, and so we are sons of God and children of God. We are going to inherit great things from God, and we are going to inherit great things along with Christ. We follow the pattern of Christ. First we suffer like he did, and then afterward we will share in his glory.

Whatever our present sufferings are, they do not compare with the glory that is coming our way. Right now things can be very difficult. All of creation groans under the weight of futility, frustration, and decay. We groan because we experience the futility, frustration, and decay, and we live in the hope that we will be saved from it all and get our bodies back new and improved for all eternity in glory. That’s where our future is. We hope for it. We patiently wait for it. For now, there is still suffering and difficulty to get through. This is where Romans chapter 8 has brought us so far.

Think of a particular difficulty in your life, a specific suffering you have gone through, when someone said, “I am praying for you.” It was not a trite expression. The person meant it, and you know the person meant it. I can think of times in my life when I found a lot of comfort and encouragement and strength knowing that someone was specifically praying to the Lord for me. I hope you have found the same. Sometimes we might need to share our burdens with people we love and trust in the Lord so we can have the encouragement and strength of knowing that they are praying for us.

Well, if you find encouragement and strength from knowing that a fellow Christian is praying for you, then surely the encouragement and strength multiply when you realize that God is doing that for you. Yes, God here essentially says, “I am praying for you.” Wow!

When does God do this? *The Spirit helps us in our weakness*. When we're weak. Car crashes. Diagnosis of a disease. Depression and anxiety. Pressing temptations to sin. Personal tests of faith. These are definitely situations that may make us feel weak. But I don't want to give the impression that the Spirit helps us only when really big bad things happen and we suddenly realize how weak and vulnerable we are. Whether we are aware of it at the moment or not, we are always weak. Wonderful creations of God that we are, we are still very limited creatures. Plus, we carry around with us our old sinful flesh that can sometimes make us feel like we are hauling a freight train behind us. We can't do everything. We can't stop everything. We don't know everything.

And Romans picks up that fact. We don't know everything, including *we do not know what we ought to pray for*. We often pray to God to forgive sins that trouble us, but we have more sins to confess than we know about. We often pray to God to provide us with our daily bread, but we will have more daily needs throughout the day than we can imagine in the morning. We pray to God for protection, but we never really know how many forces of earth and hell are bearing down on us to take our life and destroy our souls. None of this is meant to discourage us from praying. We want to pray broader and deeper today than we did yesterday. We have God's standing invitation to knock on his door in prayer and his promise that he will open the door when we do. But we are weak. We don't always know the most fitting, proper, and necessary things to pray for. That's when the Spirit comes to our aid and helps us.

So how does he do this? This is the most mysterious part, because it happens within the Godhead. The Spirit detects a weakness in us, when we do not know what we ought to be praying for, and he steps in between God the Father and us. He offers up on our behalf prayer that is appropriate and necessary. And he does not need to use the same type of language we use. He groans. He sighs. All creation groans under the weight of futility. We groan with frustration, waiting for our resurrection and everlasting life. The Spirit groans, too, on our behalf, expressing to God the Father what we cannot. His sighs are wordless. You could say they are too deep for human words. This is God talking to God for us.

And God hears what God says. *He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit*. Surely the one who searches hearts is God the Father. Just a few verses down the road in Romans 8 it says that God the Son, Christ Jesus, who died and rose, is at the right hand of God and also intercedes for us. Both Spirit and Son pray to the Father on our behalf, and God knows what they are thinking and what they are praying. God can search hearts. David said to God in Psalm 139, "O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. Search me, God, and know my heart. Test me and know my anxious thoughts." But the Father's searching and knowing in Romans 8 is not limited to human hearts. God the Father searches the Spirit and knows exactly what is on the Spirit's mind, just like the Spirit knows exactly what is on the Father's mind. When God prays to God for us, God knows, God hears, and God answers for our benefit, to give us what is truly good for us.

Finally, why does the Spirit do all this praying for us? That's a fine question, and the answer to that question is really where most of the comfort, encouragement, and strength come from. The Spirit prays and intercedes for us *according to God, in accordance with God's will*. God wants to forgive us, and he does, through his Son. God wants to help us, and he does, through his Holy Spirit, who approaches the Father on our behalf. God wants us to be prayed for, and when we don't know exactly how to do it, he does it, again through his Spirit, who petitions and prays for us. The Spirit does this because of God, for the sake of God, because this is what God wants for us. God knows his Spirit prays perfectly, and we will have all the help we truly need.

The Spirit also does this because of who we are. We are *saints*. We are holy people. We weren't born this way. We didn't choose to become holy. We haven't made ourselves holy. Rather, just like the Christians in Rome who originally received this letter from the apostle Paul, we are loved by God and called to be saints. The gospel about Jesus Christ our Savior came into our life, brought us to faith in Christ, and gave us the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. We are saints, we are holy people, through Jesus Christ. That status, given us by a gracious God, makes us VIP's, very important persons, in the eyes of God. One of the many blessings you have as a VIP child of God is knowing that the Holy Spirit helps you. He prays for you, and the Father hears and answers his prayers for you and for your everlasting good.

We haven't even gotten to the rest of Romans 8 yet. We haven't even gotten to "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him...If God is for us, who can be against us?...nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Those thoughts are still to come. But even where you stand today, knowing that God is praying for you as a saint of God, there can be no doubt how greatly God loves you and wants to keep you.

You may not have time to think about it should a tornado come bearing down on your house—or maybe you will—but I want to share with you what I think are two tremendous and quick thoughts to keep in mind during a moment of severe danger and difficulty. One thought comes from Psalm 91; the other comes from Romans 8. God commands his angels to guard you, and God is praying for you. Amen.