080220 Romans 8:26 Anchor Series ‘RR826”

There was a five-year-old boy who led the dinner prayer one night in his home. “Dear God,” he prayed confidently, “Thank you for these delicious-looking corn dogs.” After he said “Amen,” his father asked him why he thanked God for corn dogs when they were having meatloaf. He smiled and said, “I thought I’d see if God was paying attention tonight.”

Another family invited several people over for dinner. Before eating, the mother asked her six-year-old daughter, “Would you like to say the dinner prayer?” The girl replied, “I wouldn’t know what to say.” “Just pray what you’ve heard Mommy pray,” the mother encouraged. The daughter bowed her head and said, “Lord, why on earth did I invite all these people to dinner?”

Sometimes we know what to say in our prayers. Sometimes we don’t.

But prayer is a wonderful gift. God invites us to chat with him, plead with him, cry out to him, communicate whatever’s on our mind or heart with him. We can pray formally, with proper theological inflection; or we can pray informally, with quick little phrases and exclamations. Prayer keeps Christians connected with God, and keeps God very much involved the day-to-day ups and downs of our lives.

“What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear,” declares the old hymn. “What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.”

But have you ever struggled to know what to say to God? Have you ever hit a prayer slump, had the prayer yips? It happens to Christians a lot. Even the most faithful believer can hit a dry spell in his or her prayer life.

Sometimes it happens when we’re in a crisis. Frustrating, painful, or confusing life situations can shake our faith to its core. Now and then we just can’t figure God out, can’t accept his ways, can’t see why he allows certain horrible things to happen in this life, can’t imagine why he doesn’t send help right away. And, in those spiritually-challenging times, it can be hard to keep our prayers flowing.

Maybe you’ve been through such a prayer drought, in your life. Maybe you haven’t. But don’t be surprised if you do. Many of us Christians, at some point, struggle to know what to pray for as we ought.

Remember Romans 8:26 (RR826). Memorize it. Highlight it in your Bible. Keep this verse in mind, in your heart. St. Paul, talking about some of the times of suffering that we go through in this life, tells us, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”

This is, for me, of all the promises of the Bible, among the ones that I love and cherish most. Romans 8:26 is an assurance that I have had to lean on and cling to in my own life. It’s a strong, stout, robust promise that can really anchor our faith, when life gets stormy.

These words have helped me through some rough moments, some challenging spiritual situations; and I hope you’ll grab hold of the deep, durable meaning Romans 8:26 can have for your life, for your relationship with your God.

What is God promising you in this verse? Even in your worst moments, God is telling you here, “I’m involved. I’m at work. I’m helping you in times when you can’t help yourself.” When you can’t pray, when you find yourself at a loss for words in your prayer life, God’s incredible promise is that his Holy Spirit prays for you, intercedes for you, advocates for you. When your faith is messed up, or when your relationship with God is on the rocks, the Spirit is still connecting you and binding you to God.

Romans 8:26 teaches you that God is always at work on your behalf, watching out for your spiritual safety, helping you do what you can’t do yourself. Even if it means praying for you when you can’t.

And he does. You know, the Bible tells that Jesus Christ, the resurrected, ascended Savior, is interceding for us, advocating for us, up there in the heavenly realms. And, here in Romans 8:26, we are promised that when we don’t know what to pray for as we ought, the Spirit, dwelling right here within our inmost hearts, steps in for us, as well.

That promise gives me tremendous, tremendous comfort. That promise gives me incredible, incredible relief to know that it’s not just up to me. My salvation? That’s Jesus Christ, 100%, I know. He accomplished my forgiveness, not me. But hanging on to my salvation? Making sure I don’t mess it up? Keeping my faith through all of life’s disasters? That’s not just up to me, either! I’ve got help! The Holy Spirit – the third person of the Holy Trinity himself -- is always holding on to me, continually helping me out, daily giving me what I need in my spiritual life.

And you, too, friend. You may be in a rough patch right now. You may be laboring in your prayer life. You may have stopped praying. Or you may be in a spot like that down the road.

Remember Romans 8:26. Remember how far God is willing to go to save you, to hang on to you. Remember how the Holy Spirit intercedes for you, lifts up your personal needs and troubles, to keep you connected to God.

This afternoon, we’re finally confirming half of our Confirmation Class for 2020, and we’ll confirm the second half next week. Those young Christians have for two years been studying the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, the Sacraments, and the Apostles’ Creed. We talk about the Holy Spirit’s work in the Third Article of the Creed every week, here in our church. And whether you’re a young Christian, about to be confirmed, or a much more well-aged Christian specimen, it’s a great blessing to know that the outcome of our spiritual journeys is not just up to us. The Holy Spirit is always working, intervening, helping us.

Martin Luther’s Small Catechism explains the Third Article of the Creed to our Confirmation students this way. “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified, and kept me in the true faith.”

So remember Romans 8:26, one of the great promises of Scripture that anchor our faith lives in the work of God’s Holy Spirit. Amen.