080920 Romans 8:28 Anchor Series: “VFP”

I decided to share another acronym with you this week: “VFP.” That’s a tough one, so let’s do a little acronym warmup.

Since most of you are online texting and chatting constantly, you see a lot of acronyms there in cyberspace. Do you know what IDK stands for? “I don’t know.” SMH? “Shaking my head.” POS? “Parent over shoulder.”

Even here at Hope Lutheran, we use acronyms. What does MLT stand for? “Ministry Leadership Team.” How about WNA? “Wednesday Night Alive.” MOH? “Men of Hope.”

So this (VFP) is a V acronym. And you know some other V acronyms. VIP? “Very Important Pastor” (Pastor Wagner or Lineberger). VIN? “Vehicle Identification Number.” VFW? “Veterans of Foreign Wars.”

OK, what about VFP? Our sermon text today, Romans 8:28, is a VFP. I’ll tell you what that means in just one more minute. Romans 8:28 is one of the most astonishing and noteworthy promises in all the Bible. Last week I told you that Romans 8:26 is one of my favorite Bible promises. And here’s another favorite, back-to-back.

Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” That is one of the essential, foundational promises for our Christian faith. The Word of God teaches us this awesome cornerstone truth: that all things ultimately work together for good, in your life, in your world.

I love this Bible verse deeply, and this promise means so much to me. But, at the same time, Romans 8:28 is a VFP. This can be a “Very Frustrating Promise.” This has been, for me, at certain times in my life, a very frustrating promise. For many Christians, Romans 8:28 ends up a VFP.

How can a beautiful Scripture like this, a word of promise from God himself, be so frustrating?

Ask Belinda. She’s a Christian, a churchgoer, and she truly believes in Jesus Christ. She knows God loves her, and she deeply loves her Lord. But Belinda’s struggling. She lost her job. Her husband’s a disabled veteran, unable to work, and they’re not able to live on his disability. Her children are petrified of going back to school, and struggling with online learning. Belinda’s mom is in a nursing home, and she can’t go see her. Her father passed away a few months ago, and they haven’t been able to have a proper funeral. A tree limb came down on her garage roof in the storm, and there’s a hole in the roof now. Belinda’s got a lot on her plate, doesn’t she?

A friend of Belinda’s from church called her the other day, just to say hello. Belinda poured out her heart a little bit. Her friend said to her, with all good intentions, “You shouldn’t let this stuff get you down, Belinda. Romans 8:28 says, ‘All things work together for good.’ You’ll see. It’s all going to be OK.”

Belinda thinks right now that Romans 8:28 is a VFP, a very frustrating promise. She has problems and heartaches piled up all around her. She’s overwhelmed and losing hope. Belinda’s not lost her faith. She just can’t begin to see the truth of these words right now. With all that’s going on in her life, Belinda doesn’t appreciate her friend tossing these words at her, as if they can make her problems magically go away. To tell the truth, she finds this verse highly frustrating, unsatisfying, aggravating.

And she’s not the only one. When Peter was sinking beneath the waves, in the Gospel story, about to go under, do you think he wanted to hear someone say, “No problem, all things work together for good?”

Belinda, Peter, you and me, too. “How can these words possibly be true,” we wonder sometimes. All things work together for good? Even a global pandemic? Relatives battling COVID-19? Closed schools? Millions on unemployment? Feuding politicians? Confusing health and safety regulations? Neighbors fighting over wearing masks? My favorite restaurant closed? All things work together for good?

Even cancer? Diabetes? Child abuse? Sexual abuse? Racism? War? Natural disasters?

When the world’s evil assaults us, when the tragedies of daily living overwhelm us, when our fellow humans disappoint us, it’s beyond our capability to understand how all things are working together for good. If you’re fighting just to stay afloat, if you’re hurting, or scared, or feeling despair, Romans 8:28 may not make you feel one bit better. It may just seem like a VFP for you, a very frustrating promise.

It has been that for me, I will admit. But that doesn’t mean it isn’t true. That doesn’t mean we can’t anchor our faith in these words.

I freely confess, there’s much I don’t understand about God. There’s a great deal that I can’t see, or grasp, about the way he works. There are many Scriptures that puzzle me at times, and many others that puzzle me all the time. And that’s because I’m a highly imperfect human. My comprehension is severely limited. My capacity is finite, often extremely finite.

But I believe in a God who has perfect understanding, complete wisdom, limitless power, a God of infinite knowledge and insight. We confessed together a few minutes ago our faith in the Triune God, who sees all things, who knows the future, who governs the galaxies, who controls my destiny and yours. And we believe in a God who loves us with a deep, sincere compassion. A God who gave his Son to die in our place, so that we could live with him forever. A God who sacrificed himself so that we can be safe, forgiven, and loved for all time.

A God who says, to you and me today, “I’ve got you. I have your best interests, your eternal purpose, your final destination, all right here. It’s all in my control. And I want you to know that you can trust me. Trust that your life is in my hands. Trust that, no matter what, I’ll see you through. Trust that all things do work together for good, in the end, in the as-of-yet-unseen-by-you-but–seen-by-me end.”

This VFP, this wonderfully-annoying promise, is a call for you and me to trust him. And, no, we’re not always going to want to hear it. No, we’re not always ready to see it. No, we probably shouldn’t quote it to a friend when he’s sinking beneath the waves.

But don’t ever let anyone or anything take this promise away from you, either. Keep it, cling to it, build your life on it. Hang on to this VFP. And trust that your God, your Savior, your Lord who walked on the water, is hanging on to you. Today and forever! Amen.