

*The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost*  
September 11, 2011  
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Romans 11:13-15, 28-32

*I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?... As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. (NIV)*

Tragic. Horrific. Shocking. Scary. Appalling. Incomprehensible. Those were just a few of the words people used to describe the events that took place ten years ago today as planes were deliberately flown into two of our nations tallest buildings. If you remember that day like I'm sure most of you do, you probably recall the questions that began to flood our minds. How? Who? Why? What's next? While we now have answers to most of those questions there are still a couple that remain. These are questions we might even have asked or continue to ask our God. Why God? If this can happen what's next God?

I'm not going to stand outside here today and tell you I know exactly why 9/11 happened. Neither will I tell you I have some insight into specifics of what is next for our nation or for you. Yet, there are some important truths from God's Word I will share on this anniversary of the day many of us won't soon forget. One is God is never the cause of sin or evil. God is holy, righteous, and good. He can't and won't have anything to do with sin. Secondly, God is all-powerful and controls all things. He can put a stop to sin and evil at any time He chooses. He can do anything. But at times God allows sin and evil to go on for a while. He allows bad things to happen even to good people. He sometimes permits some shocking, scary things to take place in this world.

However, and this is the key and our comfort this morning, God works out all things for the good of those who love Him! Whatever God allows to happen in this world God works out those things in a way that is always best for His people! God even uses sin and evil to His advantage. For our God has one desire and one desire alone above all things. God desires your salvation. May this truth guide our thoughts and minds today as we see that our God is a God who wants to have mercy on us. **God wants to have mercy on us all.**

There are many examples of how God works good out of bad. See the life of Joseph or the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt for examples. For a more modern example do you know the three times that churches in America were fullest? If you guessed the Great Depression, World War I, and World War II you would be correct. And in our text for this morning Paul marvels once again at how God works in our world.

Right after these words of our text Paul breaks out in praise: ***“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”***

So what is God’s work that lead Paul to this doxology of praise? How was God at it again working all things for good? Here is the simplest way I can explain it. The Jews were rejecting Jesus and His Word. Many Jews were in fact hostile. They hated Paul and the message of Christ he proclaimed to them. Some even beat Paul up and tried to kill him for it. Others Jews just drove Paul away. How could they be so sinful, so evil? What an awful thing right? How could any good come out of their disobedience, their hatred, their rejection? But Paul tells us the good God was doing. Because they rejected Jesus, Paul went with God’s Word to other nations - to the Gentiles. Many of them heard the good news and believed. Permit me to read just one example. In Pisidian Antioch Luke records: ***“On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.” (Acts 13).*** God used the rejection of the Jews to bring salvation to the Gentiles.

Now Paul hopes that God works another good thing from all this. Paul wants so many Gentiles to believe that some Jews might see this and become envious. Paul wants his own people to see the blessings and benefits the Gentiles are receiving through faith in Christ Jesus that they might be jealous, ready to again hear the Word of God, and be saved. Paul writes: ***“I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.”*** He also adds: ***“For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?”*** If God can work something good by their rejection, namely bringing Gentiles back to God through the Gospel, think of what God can do when the Jews listen to Him again! It will mean life, life from the dead - salvation for them as well.

Isn’t there a warning in these verses for all of us? Have we and our nation as a whole started to become apathetic toward God’s Word? Do we take the Word and gospel message for granted? Martin Luther talked about how the Gospel and the grace it brings as a rain cloud that moves from one place to another. It goes from this country to that one for a time, but when rejected moves on to yet another place to shower it’s blessings down there. Here and in other places on the Bible we have a warning that if we do not use God’s Word we will be in danger of losing God’s Word. That is not what God wants or what we can afford.

Paul goes onto remind us it is not God who takes His grace from us. ***“For God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.”*** Literally, God does not regret His actions. He is not sorry that He chose Israel to be His people. God does not regret making those promises to the Jewish patriarchs such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God did not make a mistake by sending Jesus to them and for them. God has no remorse for sending out the gospel first for the Jew then for the Gentile. For God’s promises still stand. There was still time for Jew and Gentile alike. God’s grace in Christ remained and still remains an open

invitation for all. God wants people of all nations to believe in Jesus and live. Simply put God wants to have mercy on us all.

Paul writes to these Gentiles: ***“Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.”*** This is always the goal of our God in heaven. He wants to make sure we all know exactly where we would be without Him - that is lost and in big, big trouble. God never wants us to be comfortable in our sins; He wants us to know we can't stand before Him on our own. God never wants us to make the mistake of thinking we can have our heaven here on earth.

That is why God sometimes allows things to happen which we can't understand. God at times allows pain and trouble and tragedy to enter our lives. We are left wondering why. When we wonder this let us always go back to another tragic day, a dark Friday nearly 2000 years ago, where some of God's people there had to be asking the same thing. Why God? Why would God forsake His one and only Son whom He loved? Why would Jesus' enemies be allowed to beat, and scourge, and mock, and crucify an innocent Jesus? Why the nails and the cross? By grace God's people know the answers. The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Jesus was pierced and crushed for our sins. It was on this darkest day that God brought about the greatest good. It was only a dying Savior and a resurrected Christ whom could bring us peace. It is only through Christ that God can now have and does have mercy on you and me.

I still can't tell you why God allowed the events of 9/11 ten years ago. Perhaps God brought people to Him or closer to Him through it. Maybe it gave us a chance to once again look to God and put our trust in Him. While I can't say for sure why it or other bad things like it happen in our world, I can say this, God works it and all things for our good. I can also say what God wants to accomplish. God wants above all else people to be saved. God wants to take pity and have compassion on all people by washing away their sins in the blood of His Son. Yes, God wants all to come to the knowledge of truth. In short, God wants to have mercy on us all as He hears and answers each of us as we pray: Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. Amen.