

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
August 14, 2011
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Romans 8:26-27

In the same way, 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. (NIV)

In my now 14 years of married life, I have had several conversations with my beautiful and devoted wife that went something along these lines. And I have heard others express that they have had similar conversations. I ask Lisa what is wrong or what she needs. Lisa tells me frankly that she should not have to tell me what is wrong or what she needs. Instead, she insists that I should know her well enough by now that she should not even have to tell me. She wonders how I could be so clueless as to her needs, and why I haven't figured her out better by now. Then I usually say something along the lines that I am not a mind reader and she also should know me better. If something is wrong or she needs something then she has to tell me because for 14 years I've been missing the signals.

Perhaps some of you are much better than I am at knowing exactly what your spouse needs without a word. But when you think about it, wouldn't it be great to have someone close to us who always knows what is wrong with us and understands perfectly what we need? How awesome it would be to have someone by our side who always has the precise words and gives us the exact things we need to make everything alright! My brothers and sisters in Christ: this is what we have in our God! We have a God who knows us even better than we know ourselves. We have a Father in heaven who gives only good gifts to His children. We have a Savior who is able to sympathize with us in our human frailty. And today I pray we rejoice in this truth: **The Spirit knows exactly how to help us in our weakness. Praying for us when we do not know what to pray. Working all our prayers in accordance with God's will.**

These two verses are sandwiched between two beautiful and familiar sections of Scripture. In the preceding verses we read all our sufferings are not even worth comparing to the glory that awaits us. We read about how as God's children we groan, along with all creation, for that glorious day of redemption from this sinful world. This is our sure and certain hope and "*we wait for it patiently.*" Following these two verses we read how our God works all things for our good, how nothing can take us from His love, and how, even through all kinds of trials and troubles, because of Jesus we are super conquerors.

After writing about how the people of God groan, along with all creation, for our future hope, Paul writes "*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.*" In our present troubles and earthly sufferings not only do we keep our eyes on the glory that will be ours, but we have a Helper even now to get us through them. The Holy Spirit comes to our aid. He is by our side. When we are weak our God remains strong. Listen to what

the Holy Spirit does for us. ***“We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”***

Have you run into those moments in life? Have you had occasions where you felt lost and without answers? I have. At those times you turn to God in prayer and you don't even know what to say. You need help. You need strength. You need guidance. Perhaps a job or location move has you wondering what is in store for you. Perhaps financial issues or health issues are starting to dominate your day to day living. Maybe you reach a point with an aging loved one, as the apostle Paul did for himself, and you do not know whether is better for them to keep living for Christ or to die which is gain. So we do not know what to pray.

So many times we do not know what to pray for because of our many weaknesses. We are short sighted and narrow minded. We focus too often on earthly things and many times close our eyes to some wonderful spiritual blessings. We can't comprehend the glory that will be revealed in us. We just don't understand exactly how awesome heaven is really going to be. So our prayers are regularly weak and it is so true that frequently we do not know what to say. But the Spirit does! And ***“the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”*** What a comfort that God the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. The Holy Spirit carries our weak sighs and prayers along so that they do not cease, but are heard by our Father. The Holy Spirit lives in us, speaks, groans and prays and with His sighs and prayers will stand by our side until our final breath. The Holy Spirit, in a translation I like, prays for us *“with sighs too deep for words.”*

So pray dear friends. Pray even when you don't have the words to say. Pray even when you don't know what to ask for or where to start. Pray when you feel lost and without answers. Pray even when, you are so filled with grief, you can't get all the words out. For the Spirit knows exactly what we need to say and how to help us in our weakness. The Spirit prays for you when you do not know what to pray.

“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.” We need not ever worry that God will not understand our inmost thoughts and needs. He searches our hearts. While the Holy Spirit may intercede for us with groans words can't express, God understands - for God knows the mind of the Spirit. The Father and the Spirit are one. King David once wrote: ***“O Lord, you have searched me and you know me...Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord...Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?”*** (Psalm 139).

Now this is the comforting thing about what the Holy Spirit does with all our prayers: ***“the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.”*** The Spirit works the prayers of all believers so that they close with the same words Jesus spoke in the Garden saying yet not my will Father, but your will be done. I pray we understand what this means for us. This means when we pray we will not always get the answer we want. This means when we ask for things, God will not always say yes. But this is a very, very good thing. Why? Because we do not always know what is best for us. But God does. God answers in a way that is best for us. He works all things for our good. His will is always best.

After all, as Paul puts it just a few verses later: ***“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give***

us all things?" God certainly knows how to help us in our weakness because He does more than help us. He saves us. He saved us by shedding the blood of His own Son on a cross to pay for our sins. He saved us by sending His innocent Son to the grave and back again from it. In Jesus, God gave us exactly what we need. In Jesus, God gives us everything! If God did that for sinners like you and me, if God loves us that much, will He not also answer all our other prayers in a way that is best for us? That is why we want all our prayers to be answered according to God's will. Thankfully, the Spirit is always there working our prayers in just such a way.

If I am blessed to be married to my lovely wife another 14 years, I do pray that I get better at knowing her needs and what troubles her without her even telling me. Yet, I am grateful that she has Someone who knows her way better than I do. You and I have that same Someone who know us even better than we know ourselves. What a comfort to have that Someone by our side at all times who knows exactly what we need and how to help us in our weakness. Thank you Holy Spirit. Thank you for sighing for us with words unutterable. Thank you for knowing what is best for us even when we don't. Thank you for being at our side, for never leaving us, in good days and bad. Please keep praying for us when we don't know what to pray. Please keep working all our prayers in accordance with God's will. Amen.