

Tapestry

Romans 8:26-39; Hebrews 11:32-40

Memorial Day Service (31 May) 2012 (reworked from 1999 & 2004 All Saints sermons)

Edgewood Summit, Charleston, WV

{8:26} Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. {27} And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. {28} We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

^{11:32} What more can I say? I would run out of time if I told you about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. ³³ Through faith they conquered kingdoms, brought about justice, realized promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ put out raging fires, escaped from the edge of the sword, found strength in weakness, were mighty in war, and routed foreign armies. ³⁵ Women received back their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured and refused to be released so they could gain a better resurrection.

³⁶ But others experienced public shame by being taunted and whipped; they were even put in chains and in prison. ³⁷ They were stoned to death, they were cut in two, and they died by being murdered with swords. They went around wearing the skins of sheep and goats, needy, oppressed, and mistreated. ³⁸ The world didn't deserve them. They wandered around in deserts, mountains, caves, and holes in the ground.

³⁹ All these people didn't receive what was promised, though they were given approval for their faith. ⁴⁰ God provided something better for us so they wouldn't be made perfect without us.

Ah, do you remember the song Jiminy Cricket sang to Pinocchio?

**When you wish upon a star, makes no difference who you are
Anything your heart desires will come to you
If your heart is in your dreams, no request is too extreme
When you wish upon a star as dreamers do**

“That’s a nice hope filled song,” the little girl said. I didn’t argue with her, but I disagreed. Jiminy Cricket’s song is about **WISHING**, not about **HOPE**.

What’s the difference? **Wishing is satisfied when we get what we think is a good thing. Hoping is turning it over to God to give us what God knows is a good thing.**

Our problem is that **we don’t know enough to wish for the right things** most of the time. If you don’t believe me – follow me through just one little test:

When Joseph is seventeen, Jacob, his father, gives him a beautiful, expensive robe. [*That’s good.*]

No, that’s bad. **It makes his 10 older brothers insanely jealous of Joseph, and they plot to murder him** [*That’s bad.*]

No, that’s good, because they decide to sell him into slavery rather than kill him, and Joseph ends up in the house of Egyptian official Potiphar, who

likes Joseph so much, he puts Joseph in charge of managing his entire household. [*That's good.*]

No, that's bad. You see, Potiphar's wife is physically attracted to Joseph and she tries to seduce him. [*That's bad.*]

You're right, that *is* bad...*but* Joseph refuses to have let her have her way with him. [*That's good.*]

Well, you're right, that *is* good...*except* she won't take "no" for an answer, and one day, when there is no one around, *she* pulls his robe off him, and *he* runs out of the house. [*That's good.*]

No, that's bad. Even though nothing happened, she accuses him of trying to rape her. [Oooh, *that's bad.*]

No, that's good. He never has to worry about her again. [*That's good.*]

No, that's bad. He's thrown into prison for years! [*That's bad.*]

No, that's good. Once again, God blesses Joseph so much that he becomes the jailer's personal assistant. Then when Pharaoh needs some dreams interpreted the jailer refers Joseph, who does such a good job interpreting the dreams that Pharaoh makes Joseph second-in-command of all Egypt. And when Joseph uses his God given wisdom, he saves enough grain during bumper crop years that they have enough during seven years of famine to save all the people of Egypt and those from Israel – including Joseph's whole family. And when Joseph's family comes to Egypt they have a big happy reunion, with all previous wrongs forgiven. [*That's good.*]

No, that's bad. Because, after all of the Israelites move to Egypt, the Pharaoh friend of Joseph dies and the new Pharaoh has a different immigration policy, and he puts all the Israelites into slavery. [*That's bad*]

Well, it might seem bad, but that situation gave God the opportunity to perform the most incredible act in human history to date – since the flood in Noah's day – and the Israelites are freed, through the parting of the Sea; and they return to the Promised Land, reshaped into a nation of God's Chosen People, instead of just a wandering tribe. And they still celebrate every year that Deliverance of God. [*That's good*]

Good? Bad? We seem to have a hard time making up our minds.

So often, we have that problem: we don't know enough of what is involved – both now and how it's going to work out down the road – we don't know enough to wish for

the right thing. And if left to our own devices, we get disappointed whenever it doesn't turn out how we had wished.

But instead of wishing upon a star, we can place our Hope in God, who does not disappoint.

Do you remember the poem:

**My life is but a tapestry
Between my Lord and me.
I cannot choose the colors;
He worketh steadily
Oftimes He weaveth sorrow,
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
And I, the underside.
Not 'til the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Shall God unroll the canvas
And explain the reason why.
The dark threads are as needful
In the Weaver's skilful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.**

This tapestry {demonstrating by unrolling a weaving} shows more than just the coming together of different events in each of our lives – all weaving a design and pattern that we cannot – from the view on this side alone – see its full beauty.

The tapestry also represents a weaving together of different lives:

- Lives that intersect with us now
- Lives that have intersected in the past
- And – also – OUR lives intersecting lives we see now – as well as weaving a design that we cannot see now.

Can you see [as I unroll the woven cloth to reveal threads of the warp hanging without the woof threads interwoven.] how these WARP THREADS hang loosely without form or design. They are incomplete without the interweaving of the WOOF THREADS.

Each one of our lives is a woof thread that must continue the tapestry begun before our lives – it continues during our lives. – and it continues after our lives

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a tapestry. As the writer of Hebrews wrote – **EACH PERSON'S LIFE DOES NOT REACH COMPLETION IN THEIR OWN LIFE.** The completion comes in the tapestry of the Kingdom of Heaven when all God's children throughout the history and future of humanity weave their warp and woof.

Those who have gone on before – they are watching us even now. And more than that they are **cheering us on** – to help bring completion to what they started.

You don't have to be perfect to be a saint. You just have to own that you are a beloved child of God, precious and beautiful to behold.

And every event in each of our imperfect lives – through the glorious power of resurrection – can be transformed into an beautiful part of that Kingdom Tapestry.

Today we remembered, by reading of names and lighting of candles, those who have gone on before. **“Who we are”** is interwoven with **“who they were.”**

On the occasion of his worshipping with the Saint Marks congregation on All Saints Sunday, in 2006, **Bishop William Boyd Grove** was asked to give the benediction. These were the words he said, which are applicable to our gathering here today:

It is my experience, and it is my conviction, that the veil between heaven and earth, between the saints here and there, is the most sheer of all curtains; and that, at some times, when we are quiet and really listen, we can hear those on the other side of that sheer curtain talking to us. And, with the eyes of faith, we can see through it. And on some holy days, as today, the curtain is pulled back and the angels come and stand and kneel with us.

And there's even more – when we come to the Lord's Table, we are joining even now, in the appetizer course with those who are gathered around the Lord's Table sharing the Great Banquet with Him.

Yes, all the saints are gathered for eternity at God's Banquet. They cheer us on. And, in that mysterious and unexplainable way, when we share in the Body and Blood of Jesus, we, too are sharing with them in this feast, as we acknowledge the weaving together of our lives and theirs – a tapestry that the Great Weaver of the Universe is continuing through this moment, in this place.

We remember. We give thanks. And we take Hope. Thanks be to God. Amen.