

“Good to Go”
Romans 8:28-29

Being beaten up by your brothers is not a good thing nor is getting thrown into a well or even sold as a slave. Who would think being wrongly accused of a crime or thrown into prison was good or even living in the midst of a nation-wide famine? No one I know would say any of those things are “good” - unless your name is Joseph. Most know his story, whether from Genesis or Broadway. And it is not a “good” story unless you are some kind of fatalist who says things like, “All’s well that ends well”. And although Joseph’s life actually ends pretty “well” it is one of his closing remarks that may be the most pertinent for us this morning. When the “jig” was almost up (Joseph revealing his true and hidden identity that he was in fact the brother of those men standing before him) he says some pretty unforgettable words. If you remember the brothers were to blame, solely to blame, for the downward spiral of the life of Jacob’s youngest son. Joseph would have taken over the family business, he most certainly would have continued the godly line and reputation of his father and fulfilled all of God’s promises through Abraham (Joseph’s grandfather) if not for the men (the brothers) who were now groveling for food from Pharaoh’s second in command, who just happened to be their little brother Joseph. The brothers didn’t recognize Joseph but he recognized them and oh how the tables had turned. Most little brothers have what I would call “payback dreams” in relation to their older brothers – you know getting them back for all they had done in their younger years and Joseph, we can assume, was no different and would have had similar nightmares as he shivered in that cold well, or wept in that damp prison cell. Even though Joseph was deserving of a little “correction” and “discipline” he was not deserving of what actually happened because of his brothers. Joseph was pompous but not deserving to be a slave; arrogant but shouldn’t be cast as a criminal. Now it may sound like days when reading the story of Joseph in Genesis, or hours if you are watching the play, but in truth the story takes years – years of trouble, years of hardship, years of heartache. Even we, the readers, are ready for Joseph to let his brothers “have it” by Genesis 50 but instead Joseph’s words are far different than what we might expect, yes, far different than anyone expects. When like the original audience we are waiting for the veil to be lifted and a grand “aha” proclaimed through the palace Joseph, upon revealing his true identity declares, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for **good**.” (Genesis 50:20)

And in only a moment, our understanding of “good” is turned on its head – much like it would have been for the early church in Rome when Paul penned those words in Romans 8. Although we may have heard a very different message last Sunday – that of resurrection and the hope of “life after life after death” (Source: NT Wright) this was not necessarily the reality for first century Rome or twenty first century Canada, for that matter. I get in a lot of trouble around our house. I know to many

of you, that is no surprise. So putting aside all the stupid things I do, its one simple word that causes the most dissention in my house. It's my "go to" response to Lily when she asks me about the movie or to Allyson when she wonders about my day at the office or a friend who asks how I'm feeling. It bothers most because it doesn't really mean anything. It's just something to say but often hides the real feelings hidden beneath the surface. The word is "good". How was the movie Dad? Good. How was your day at the office Kirk? Good. How are you feeling today? Good. I say it's not the real answer because most of the time my life is not very "good." And chances are you can say the same. And I'm not saying our lives are always "bad," which most think is the opposite of "good." It's just that "good" is relative, impersonal and can't be quantified. I say this because of what we learned last week. Last Sunday we were reminded that physical demise and worldly decay are realities of our everyday. We should not treat death or illness as "unexpected or trials and troubles as surprises In fact most of the things we experience on a daily basis are not necessarily "good," at least in the world's eyes. Our boss yells at us. Our finances are a mess. Our kids are troubled. Our dishwasher needs to be replaced. Our significant other is mad at us. Our health is a concern. Our parent is dying. None of these things are, so-called "good." And as much as your most religious friends loves to quote Romans 8:28 to you in the midst of all the bad life offers "by saying something like, "Remember (insert your name here) "all things will work together for good..." (8:28a) But what your friend misunderstands is that all things are not "good" per sea but that "they work together for good" (or as the NIV says, "the good." In other words we (and your well-meaning friend) cannot simply focus on one thing in your life as good or bad but how all things together although unknown to us are known by God and not beyond God's reach for "those who love God and are called according to his (God's) purpose" (8:28bc) For the believer all things together then are good because God is working to his final purpose and goal.

So by the time we get to our passage this morning we reach, as one pastor/teacher reminds us is "Mount Everest or the pinnacle of the book of Romans." (Source: John Piper) For it is the latter part of Romans 8 to where Paul has been building, saying in not so many words that "we are good to go." Family's uses this phrase as they are packed for the family vacation and the last one out the door is supposed to lock the door. But it's also a phrase that I think we could use in what Barbara Brown Taylor calls the "meantime" or "that time between Christ's first and second coming". The waiting is the hardest: We long to be made new but we are still living with the old. It can appear that everything is against us. But yet, somehow we are good to go. It appears that God might be ready to give up on us, but we are good to go. It may seem, by what we are experiencing, that God's love for us is questionable, but we are good to go. How do I know this? I remember those three questions in Romans that inspire me to keep going.

I'm not sure if you noticed or not but Romans 8 is full of questions. Not questions, as in questions looking for an answer but questions posed and then answered by Paul himself. Each begins the same way, with the same pronoun. And if you are feeling, like I think you probably are, then please consider each as a word from God just for you and reminds you, that yes, you are good to go, no matter what you stand up against. And that's the first question: **"Who is against us?"** (vs. 31) Maybe our first response is everyone and everything is against me. And Paul is not saying, "No one is against us" for there are many things and many people who are against us. However this question is not meant to focus on who is against us, per se, but who is for us. I know I've told some of you the story about being bullied during my first year in Junior High. The bus dropped us at the bottom of the hill – actually two hills that took around 20 minutes to walk up to my house. For the first two weeks of school I was bullied by two kids who were two years older than I. They began by taunting on the bus. And then the taunting turned into pushing and spitting and knocking down. I had friends. A bunch of friends on the bus but no one, not one single one did anything or said anything. I didn't have anyone on my side. It lasted two weeks. One day, after school, I broke down and told my older brother Kevin what had been happening. He told me, "Let's go." "Go where." "Come on." So we walked up the street. I don't remember him saying anything. We walked up to the next street, turned on it and walked up the driveway that was the first house on the right. It was the home of one of the bullies. The bully's older brother opened the door – He was the same age of my brother. Kevin raised his hand and pointed his finger at the nose of the older brother and said these words that I will never forget. "Your little brother has been picking on my little brother. If he pick on my little brother anymore I will pick on you," which is the "G rating" response for this morning. And we left. My brother never said anything else about that day, even to this day. All of a sudden it didn't matter who was against me. All that matter was Who was for me. God is for you. The world may be against you. Life may be against you but God is for you. God is on your side ready to protect you from the biggest, baddest bully on your street. Isn't that good?

But there's more. Paul then asks the question: **Who is it to condemn?** (vs. 34) Condemnation is courthouse language. No condemnation means someone is found innocent of the accusation against them but even more a not guilty verdict is found. Some would say the greatest weapon of Satan is doubt. It's not necessarily powerful attacks but sly wonderings as in, "Are you really forgiven" that are the most damaging to us. On the way to resurrection the Devil will try to deceive us and blind us and accuse us and swallow us up in feelings of guilt. So Paul writes about "already now" of no condemnation: "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns [there's the word!]? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us." So here we not only have the backward look

to remind us that Christ has died and become our condemnation, but the forward look to remind us that, even though there is a judgment coming, and we will sometimes tremble at the thought of it, nevertheless, already now there is no condemnation. You don't have to wait for the final inheritance to know what this portion will be. "Who will bring a charge against God's elect?" In that last day when your whole life — with all its Romans-seven-imperfections is spread before you — this alone will be your hope: "It is God who justifies . . . it is Christ Jesus who died . . . who was raised . . . who intercedes and who loves. Isn't that good?"

And finally "**Who will separate us from the love of Christ?**" (vs. 35) Just as God sticks with us and forgives He also loves us in Christ. This is what makes us "more than" conquerors. Not simple conquerors but "more than" conquerors. Sin is real and we are not perfect. We will fail, we will disappoint, we will sin but God will love. We will mess up, we will fall short, and we will repeat but God will love. You are never beyond the love of God. It doesn't mean that God will approved of everything we do (because as we have been learning in the first seven chapter of Romans) there is a thing called sin and we will do that which disappoints and saddens God but God will still love us. Jesus did not die for us in our goodness for while we were still sinner, Christ died for us. Nothing is beyond God's love and redemption. Nothing you have ever done or ever will do will stop Jesus from loving you. You need to believe that this morning. Nothing is beyond God's love — "neither death nor life, nor angels or rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor heights nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from — what? - The love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, Isn't that good?"

So we are good to go, right? As we await Jesus' return we are good to go. As we deal with life and the stuff it throws at us, we are good to go. We will keep going, keep persevering, keep remembering and reminding one another that we have someone WHO is for us, someone WHO will not condemns and one WHO loves us, no matter what. Yes, we're good to go!