

## "God Is Good - Always"

Text: John 2:1-11

<sup>ESV</sup>(James 1:16-18) ***Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. <sup>17</sup> Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. <sup>18</sup> Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Amen.***

Dear Fellow Christians:

When you consider the words of James in the Scripture you just heard, how would you characterize or define **"every good and perfect gift"**? In other words, when you hear those words, do you include everything that God either causes or allows into your life, or just the good stuff? I'm guessing that most would include only the good stuff and, more than that, that most would naturally consider themselves the judge that gets to decide what is good and what is bad. After all, doesn't the passage say **"good"** and **"perfect"** when it describes the gifts that come from God, and who better than me to decide which is which?

That's two separate issues or questions, actually. While it is true that James speaks of **"every good gift and every perfect gift,"** the passage doesn't tell us that we get to judge which is which, whether good or bad. In fact, you and I are supremely *unqualified* to make such determinations. Need proof? Think back to how many times your opinion changed concerning something that happened to you, especially after the passage of time. Things that you first considered good, turned out to be not so good, and things that you first considered bad, turned out to be very, very good. Did you in your youth, for example, consider it pretty much the end of the world when "the love of your life" broke up with you – only to see, maybe many years later, what a blessing that actually was? Did you ever long for something that, again, with the passage of time you came to recognize as bad, even evil? If we but take the time to honestly evaluate, every Christian can see a whole herd of examples in the rearview mirror.

So who gets to decide, if not us? God, of course. Nor is it even really necessary that we try to affix a label of "good" or "bad" on everything that happens to us. The key is to simply and humbly walk in harmony with our God's will for our lives, and to trust that his love remains constant – no matter what – and to cling tenaciously to the immutable truth that God is good – always.

This morning's text will help in that regard. That text is found in Paul's Second Letter to Timothy, the Fourth Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup>(**2 Timothy. 4:16-20**) ***At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! <sup>17</sup> But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. <sup>18</sup> The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. <sup>19</sup> Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. <sup>20</sup> Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus.***

This is God's Word. That God would bless us through the study of these divine words this morning, and that he would strengthen our confidence in his unwavering love, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"** Amen.

It's probably no secret to most of you here that Joseph is one of my Bible heroes. There are many such heroes, but Joseph always stands out. It is hard to comprehend all that Joseph endured during the dark days of his life. Most of us couldn't imagine brothers that could be that cruel, or being sold into slavery, or languishing in a fetid prison – falsely accused and unjustly forsaken. Yet through all of that, Joseph remained both honorable and upbeat. He looked for God's hand in everything that happened to him, and he refused the temptation, powerful as it must have been, to exact his own personal revenge. He was certainly not without his faults. He exhibited, for example, the common narcissism and self-centered cluelessness of youth, but that just makes him all the more approachable, all the more endearing.

We heard in our Old Testament lesson for this morning of the event that marked the end of the darkest part of his life – the final reconciliation with his brothers. Or did we? Was it? Was that the end of the darkest part of Joseph's life? According to what is recorded in the Bible, maybe. But there is really no such thing in the real world as "happily ever after," is there? Joseph's life went on, a life that would obviously have been characterized by the constant stress of running one of the most powerful countries of the day in the midst of a region-wide seven year famine. He reconciled with his brothers, but we have no way of knowing if his brothers really changed. In fact there is evidence they continued to doubt Joseph's good will, and they plotted accordingly. So also Joseph was there when his father died, and

though he lived to be 110, there is no indication that he didn't have to suffer through the same aches, injuries, and infirmities common to those who live that long.

It would be most interesting to hear from Joseph himself what label he would affix to the various hardships of his life, whether "good" or "bad." In reality we have a pretty good idea, for we are given an insight into the man's character in the words he spoke to his brothers: <sup>ESV</sup>(**Genesis 50:19-21**) ***But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. 21 So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.*** The character of Joseph was to regard God as good – always.

Paul was another example. As difficult as Joseph's life was for a time, Paul received ten times worse, many times over. Not only did he have to deal with the shame of having once persecuted Christ's Church, you will recall his summary of some of what he had to suffer: <sup>ESV</sup>(**2 Corinthians 11:23-30**) ***Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one-- I am talking like a madman-- with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? 30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.***

Yet despite all of this, Paul continued to sing the praises of his God, and even articulated the good in all of his sufferings: <sup>ESV</sup>(**Romans 5:2-5**) ***Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts***

***through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*** Paul too saw the goodness of God in the evil intended by sinful men.

Our text revealed yet more heartache and hardship for Paul. Remember that this Second Letter to Timothy was written when Paul was languishing in a brutal Roman prison, still stung by the desertion of his friends, none of which came to his defense at his first hearing before his Roman captors. Yet even in this he saw the Lord's hand, his God's goodness. Through all of the misery and suffering he saw the goodness of God in that he was given the courage and opportunity to proclaim the gospel to yet more Gentile souls. Even in the midst of the evil, unjust, and dishonorable actions of brutal and dishonest men, Paul recognized the goodness and love of his Savior God.

There is yet another clue in our text that is easily missed – though it reveals a powerful and informative truth. That clue is found in these simple, innocuous words: ***"Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus."*** These simple words, so easily passed over as inconsequential, are anything but. There is, in fact, a wealth of insight and comfort offered to us here, if we but take the time to really listen to what the Holy Spirit here teaches us.

Consider first these words from Acts 19:11-12: ***And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.*** Dates are important here. Acts 19 describes events that took place in Ephesus during Paul's Third Missionary Journey. The year was 56-57AD. Note especially the miraculous healing powers that were given to Paul during this time. Even handkerchiefs and aprons that had once touched his skin were carried off and used to heal the sick, the diseased, and the possessed. He didn't even have to be present, such was the power that God was exercising through his servant Paul.

Paul's Second Letter to Timothy, which includes our text, was written about 10 years later – in 66 or 67AD. There Paul says, ***"I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus,"*** and now those simple, seemingly unremarkable words in our text are both significant and informative.

How could it possibly be that, while in Ephesus, even a piece of cloth that touched Paul had the power to heal, and then just 10 years later

Paul has to leave his friend Trophimus in Miletus because he is too sick to travel? The answer is undoubtedly that God had determined that as the New Testament came into existence, the miraculous healing powers of the Apostles would fade. More to the point of our study this morning, there is no evidence that Paul had a problem with this. There is also no evidence that the change caused him to question God's power, his love, or his perpetual goodness and compassion. It further means that you and I cannot allow difficult things like sickness or disease in our own lives to cause us to question God or to doubt ourselves.

Prosperity preachers (those who promote a "name it, claim it" perversion of the Christian faith) will tell you otherwise. The "gospel" they proclaim is that Christians have a right to dictate to God what happens to them in this life. According to their theology, if a Christian is sick, he can demand immediate healing from God. They also teach that if the sickness or disease lingers, then that is evidence that the Christian is harboring either doubts (lack of faith in God and his ability to heal) or some hidden sin or moral defect.

There's a whole world of problems with their theology, but we focus on just one this morning: they are setting themselves up as those who get to pass judgment on whatever God brings or allows into their lives. They get to label every event in their lives as good or bad. They are profoundly unqualified for such a task, as are you and I.

Did Paul ask God to heal his friend? It would be unimaginable to think that he didn't. Was he disappointed that Trophimus couldn't accompany him to Rome? Undoubtedly, as he had been a trusted travelling companion and a valued and loyal friend. Maybe he wouldn't have been "forsaken by all" if Trophimus had made the trip to Rome. Did he label the whole thing as "bad" or "evil" and blame God? Our text answers for us: ***At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! <sup>17</sup> But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. <sup>18</sup> The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever.***

Remember, these words come right before he tells Timothy that Trophimus had been too sick to make the trip to Rome, and he expresses not frustration and accusation but the goodness of God manifested through the entire experience. You and I need to learn from his example. God alone knows what is best for each of us, and when. Never doubt his wisdom or his love, especially during those painful and

difficult days. He gave his very best when he sent Jesus to suffer and die as our substitute, and his Son never once characterized his own unimaginable hardships as "bad" or "evil." He walked that dark road with absolute willingness, trusting his Father's wisdom and love.

God grant to each of us that same wisdom, that we might accept both easy times and hard from his hand, never for a moment doubting his wisdom, his compassion, and his perfect, divine love. *"What God ordains is always good"* – always. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

<sup>ESV</sup>(**Genesis 45:3-15**) And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. <sup>4</sup> So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. <sup>5</sup> And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. <sup>6</sup> For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. <sup>7</sup> And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. <sup>8</sup> So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. <sup>9</sup> Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry. <sup>10</sup> You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. <sup>11</sup> There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.' <sup>12</sup> And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. <sup>13</sup> You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." <sup>14</sup> Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. <sup>15</sup> And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

<sup>ESV</sup>(**Luke 6:27-38**) "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. <sup>29</sup> To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. <sup>30</sup> Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. <sup>31</sup> And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. <sup>32</sup> "If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup> And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. <sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. <sup>37</sup> "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; <sup>38</sup> give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: [www.bismarcklutheran.org](http://www.bismarcklutheran.org)

Mark Johnson, President      Angela Pfennig, Organist  
Michael Roehl, Pastor

**The Seventh Sunday after Epiphany – February 24, 2019**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 3 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, Be Present Now"

## The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The First Lesson:** (Genesis 45:3-15) While there are many negative examples in the Bible (examples of what *not* to do and how *not* to act) there are also many positive. Joseph is one of the greatest of these positive examples. Though repeatedly mistreated and betrayed by friends and family, he continued to trust in his God and he refused to seek revenge upon his enemies. Hard times did not cause him to doubt God's love.

**The Second Lesson:** (Luke 6:27-38) In our second lesson, Jesus defines the love that he wants to see in his children – the love Joseph put into practice in our first lesson. It is profoundly countercultural to promote love for our enemies, but that is exactly what Jesus here calls on us to do. He does not command an emotional love, but rather a humble, selfless attitude that seeks the welfare of others, even our enemies. To rescue souls from eternal destruction is always supposed to be our ultimate goal, as it was Christ's.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 22. (Red Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 759 (Brown Hymnal)

"These Are the Facts"

## The Sermon – Text: 2 Timothy 4:16-20 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**"God Is Good - Always"**

## The Offertory – page 22. (Red Hymnal)

## The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

## The Pre-Communion Hymn – 330 (Stanzas 1-4) Red Hymnal)

"I Come to Thee, O Blessed Lord"

## The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

## The Distribution

## The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 313 (Stanzas 1) Red Hymnal)

"O Lord, We Praise Thee"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

## Attendance – Sunday (30) Average (38)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship and coffee hour
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Bible Study
<b>Friday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Time Out
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship and coffee hour

**CLC News** – Teacher Paul Tiefel has returned the call to Faith of Markesan. Missionary Peter Evensen is considering the call to Resurrection of Corpus Christi. St. John's of Clarkston, WA has called Teacher Andrew Roehl.

**Time Out** – The Time Out meeting for March is scheduled for this Friday. All will meet at the church at 6pm, and the adults will move to the Mick and Kristi Johnson home after a devotion at the church. Please consult the sign-up sheet on the mailbox table if you plan to attend.

**Daily Rest** – The CLC Board of Education and Publications has begun publication of a daily devotion booklet called *Daily Rest*. If anyone is still subscribing to *Meditations*, please consider switching to *Daily Rest*. The first issue, which covers March 6 – June 9, has been provided free to all members. Please look for a copy in your mailbox, and help yourself to any additional copies you might use (or share). We have plenty. Subscriptions after this first issue will be \$15 annually. You can subscribe by signing the sheet on the mailbox table.

**CLC Women's Retreat** – This year's retreat is scheduled for March 22-24 in Winona, MN. Additional information is available in the fellowship hall on the bulletin board near the storeroom.