

One insurance company asks, “Are you in good hands?” The implication is as long as you’re with them, then you are. Funny how some insurance policies don’t cover so called acts of God. And that’s the ingenious thing about this ad campaign. The time you need to know you’re in good hands is exactly when you need an insurance company—when disaster strikes. It’s in suffering and calamities that we need to know that we’re in good hands.

It’s funny how the lectionary works. On the day I was born, you could have looked ahead in the lectionary schedule and determined that we would be reading this reading on this particular day, yet how funny it is that it almost seems like of all the readings in the Bible, the Holy Spirit chose just this one for our comfort, guidance, and encouragement this morning.

Our theme verse for this sermon is verse 19: **“Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”** We’re going to break down this verse and use other parts of the reading to support it. “Are you in good hands?” Our theme: WE CAN TRUST OUR FAITHFUL CREATOR TO DELIVER US THROUGH SUFFERING.

First very simply, I. Christians will suffer. Peter starts our lesson saying, **“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”** Yet we are surprised, aren’t we?

We’re surprised when for a time, prudence and safety dictates that we pause in-person worship. We’re surprised when a little virus nanometers wide puts our vacation plans or livelihood on hold. We’re surprised when **“Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”** However, this time it’s not a wild beast, a fire, or a war, but an invisible enemy, detectable only through getting a cotton swab stuck deep into your nostrils. Do we not think the devil is using this pandemic as a chance to sow fear, discord, and death?

Peter tells us not to be surprised, but we’re shocked. He tells us not to be ashamed, yet we are tempted to be ashamed. He tells us to rejoice, yet we are tempted to despair. He tells us to glorify God, yet we are tempted to curse. Are you in good hands?

“But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.” We expect not to suffer. However, Christ suffered, so what do we expect? We have a God who suffers. Our God suffers on the cross. Behold the lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

Jesus’ suffering wasn’t being quarantined. It was being separated from God as He cried out on the cross, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** His suffering wasn’t temporarily pausing worship, but even being run out of town on a rail as He was kicked out of His hometown synagogue. His suffering wasn’t a cotton swab up His nose, but lashes on His back. The corona He suffered was a

crown of thorns piercing His head. He suffered as He took on the sins of the world. And we as Christians are conformed into the image of the God who suffers.

“Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” Second, II. Suffering is according to God’s Will. Now let me be clear, our Heavenly Father is not the author of evil. Without getting into the finer philosophical points, suffice it to say that He subdues *everything* under Him to work for His purposes. He is the God of everything He has created, which is to say that He is the God of everyone and everything. Even the devil.

Believe it or not, our Lord uses the devil’s fury, anger, and destruction for His creative purposes. The Lord is the master of making lemonade out of lemons. In the book of Genesis, Joseph says, **“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.”** God uses evil for His good purposes. Whenever you have an annoying co-worker, neighbor, or relative, remember that our Lord is able to repurpose even the devil’s schemes for good.

“Are you in good hands?” Even in this time when it may seem that God has abandoned us, we are in His loving hands. Even when the plan seems to have come unraveled, we’re just getting to the best part. We can know this because even Jesus’ suffering and death was all according to the plan.

According to my count, there are a dozen instances throughout the Gospels where Jesus Himself says that it was necessary that He suffer, die, and rise again. This isn’t just a suggestion or a guestimate. The “it is necessary” means that it was planned from the beginning of time. It was part of God’s will that Jesus suffer.

If that’s the case for Jesus, we can take comfort and confidence knowing that we are in good hands as even in the midst of tragedy, crisis, and suffering, God is working out good from evil and turning the devil’s plans for ill into good.

“Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” Third, III. Our creator is faithful. He doesn’t just set creation and forget it. The Father did not abandon Jesus’ soul to death but raised Him up on the third day. And so too, Peter gives us ample reason to trust our creator.

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” “Are you in good hands?” Yes, indeed you are! We can trust our creator to get us through any trial or tribulation we face. We can trust that any sufferings we’re going through are nothing compared to the comforts awaiting us in the life to come.

“And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm,

strengthen, and establish you.” I’m not a medical expert. I don’t know how long we’ll be fighting coronavirus. Months? Years? I don’t know when this will end and we can go back to graduation parties, traveling via airplane, and packed stadiums for concerts and sports.

No matter how long it takes, looking back, it will seem like a little while. Certainly we’ll be talking about these days even when our grandkids themselves are old and grey. But this is nothing compared to the eternal glory in Christ wherein we will experience peace, celebration, and comfort. Even now, our faithful creator is working to restore, confirm, strengthen us.

“Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” IV. In this midst of suffering, we can do good. Suffering doesn’t mean hole up and cut out contact from the outside world. Certainly some of us may choose to quarantine and avoid public spaces, and no Christian should condemn another for choosing that cautious stance. Each of us has the right to make that choice. But whether you are staying home or venturing out, there is still good that God will work in us in the midst of this pandemic.

May I remind you that the most good that was ever done took place when someone suffered the most. Jesus’ suffering and death was the most painful and excruciating event in history, yet through this suffering, God’s wrath was atoned, and the ultimate good was accomplished.

In the midst of adversity, I have seen the folks of Faith step up their game. You have been patient with me as I have been trying my best to make decisions that are wise and safe for us as a group; even if the decision I make isn’t the way you would have done things. Your generosity has sprung forth such that there is no lack to our Good Samaritan fund which helps members and other close associates who are in need. We’re on track for budget.

People are making masks. Individuals have donated to food pantries. Volunteers are growing grass over dirt patches on our lawn. I know that’s a silly thing to mention, but at least something is thriving in the midst of all this death. Helpers are recording this service and volunteering their voices for public consumption on the Internet. Couples have come to me and said, “We want to do the right thing and get married, even if it means our party plans have to be postponed.” On Friday we gathered together to have a birthday party parade for one of our Faith family. These things are the kinds of things that illustrate verse 19 **“Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”**

Of course, I need all the Lutheran disclaimers. We’re still sinful and we rely on Jesus for forgiveness. We don’t do these things to earn eternal life. We could always do better or do more. Maybe this isn’t how you’re supposed to end a sermon, but knowing we’re in good hands, keep up the good work Faith Lutheran!