

**+ Romans 8:28-32 + In Christ, There Is No Doubt +
+ Christian Victory Service of Thelma Ruth Kelly nee Combs + 26 November 2013 +**

Dear Friends and Family of Thelma Kelly,

Thelma knew. In the nearly six years that I knew her and served as her pastor, I rarely ever got the impression that Thelma was uncertain. When she walked in those doors in 2007, after her husband of 52 years had passed away, all it took was one worship service and she knew that this was where she was going to stay. When she wanted to help or serve—and she loved to do so especially behind the scenes—she knew what she wanted to do to serve her Lord. She knew what she liked and what she didn't. She knew what she could do and couldn't do. Thelma knew

When she was diagnosed with cancer about 2 ½ years ago and received a prognosis of 6 months to live, Thelma really didn't know how much longer the Lord would allow her to live. She knew it would be a struggle and she knew she wanted to get her house in order, but in spite of all that, there was no doubt she knew that Jesus would be with her to the end. She knew Jesus would bring her to be with him in heaven not because she was so great or had earned his favor, but because of what he had done for her. Even amidst the pain and all the challenges of the last stage of cancer, even amidst moments of confusion and wondering "Why?", Thelma still knew that Jesus would soon bring her home to be with him in heaven.

She had no reason to doubt her Savior's love for her. He had already done so much. So when the Lord finally called her home on Thursday morning, Thelma was ready. It really shouldn't surprise us, then, that the Scripture text she chose for her funeral sermon from Romans 8 leaves us no doubt where we'll find comfort and strength. Drying our tears, the Apostle Paul makes it clear that **IN CHRIST, THERE IS NO DOUBT.**

When it comes to things like cancer or suffering and pain or tragedy or death, one of the first questions that come to mind is "Why?" "Why did God allow this to happen to me?" On the heels of questions like that is the question "how?" "How am I going to get through this?" They're certainly not new questions. They're questions that we're all tempted to ask in our darkest, most difficult days. So how does the Apostle Paul answer these questions that flow from so much emotion and frustration and grief? ***"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."***

That might make us feel a little uneasy. If ***"in all things God works for the good of those who love him"***, you might start wondering how much you love him and if you love him enough to help you through this time of grief. Maybe you wonder if God was disappointed or angry or displeased with Thelma by allowing her to have cancer or with you by taking her from this life. The reality of death does remind us that ***"the wages of sin is death"*** (Romans 6:23a), that it comes naturally to all of us because we all disobey God and deserve only his wrath and punishment. Deep down that's something we all know.

Yet the Apostle puts our hearts at ease and dries our tears as he reminds us that it's not about our lackluster love for God or our failure to love God, but his love for us in our Savior Jesus Christ. He reminds us that ***"we know"*** God guides all things ***"for the good of those...who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son...And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."*** Paul wants us to know God had a plan to save sinners, to save the dying, to save us, to save Thelma.

You see, even in this time of grief, the Lord gives you a real reason to rejoice. On Thursday morning, it wasn't evidence of God's disappointment or anger or displeasure, but evidence that God's plan for Thelma had come to its heavenly conclusion. From eternity God had it all figured out how he was going to save her. That plan started with the sending of a Savior.

Thelma was a sinful human being born of sinful parents and descended from sinners all the way back to our first parents. By nature, Thelma disobeyed God's holy will and like all of us, deserved his eternal condemnation. Yet our God in his grace and mercy sent a Savior to be her Substitute in life and in death. Jesus perfectly obeyed his Father's holy will in her place and offered his life as the payment for her sins that the holy God would declare her holy in his sight. That same Jesus occupied the tomb she deserved, but then conquered death by gloriously rising from the dead on Easter Sunday. Having carried out that portion of God's plan to save Thelma, Jesus returned to guide all things ***"for the good of those...who have been called according to his purpose."***

From eternity, Christ had chosen Thelma to be his own and guided all things so she would know that fact beyond any doubt. As a baby, Jesus welcomed Thelma into his family giving her saving faith through the water

and Word of Holy Baptism. In his love, he caused that faith to grow strong through the hearing and reading and studying of God's Holy Word. In her later years, the Lord in his grace brought her here to be strengthened with the Word of God and fed with his Holy Supper for the forgiveness of sins.

Yet all along God's plan wasn't about what she was doing, although she loved to serve her Lord. It wasn't about how great of a Christian or church member she was, although she was a faithful example for her fellow believers. It was never about her, but about what God in his love had done for her in Christ Jesus. It was clear that in Christ, there was no need for doubt. There was no need to doubt that in God's unconditional, unfathomable love, he had chosen her to be his own, that he had called her through his Gospel message, that he had justified or declared her holy in his sight through the cleansing blood of Christ, and that he would one day glorify her and bring her to be with him in the glories of heaven.

In Christ, there was no doubt and there continues to be no doubt. So ***“what, then, shall we say in response to this?”*** How are we going to respond to all this love and grace from God? By faith in Christ, we can respond with more confidence. ***“If God is for us, who can be against us?”*** For Thelma, a lifetime of guilt couldn't stand before the merciful love of her Savior Jesus. Cancer and all its complications couldn't separate her from her Savior's love for her, and not even death could withstand her living Savior who was going to bring her home to heaven. Her gracious God was for her and for us. For us, neither guilt, nor grief, nor death can separate us from that same merciful love of our crucified and risen Savior. Nothing, then, ***“can be against us”***.

...But Paul goes on! ***“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?”*** Did you ever wonder how Thelma made it through to the end, how she survived 2 ½ years after the doctors had predicted only 6 months? Was it because she was so tough, so stubborn, so unwilling to give up? Perhaps there was a little of that, but most importantly, her Savior-God gave her strength, gave her hope, gave her life day after day from his gracious and open hand of blessing. He had saved her from sin and hell. Certainly he could save her from cancer and death, and in his own way he did.

That same merciful Savior-God opens his hand of blessing for you too. He will be the source of comfort for you in the days and weeks and months to come as he dries your tears with the real comfort of the resurrection and life eternal with him in the glories of heaven. He will give you strength when things settle back into a normal way of life. He will give you peace not only with the knowledge that Thelma is now in heaven with her Savior, but above all, that he has reconciled you with the holy God so you can be there too. He will give you the same confidence that flows from faith in Christ Jesus to know that God does work all things for the good of those who love him.

Thelma knew. Thelma knew God's love for her in Christ. There was no doubt about that, even in the most difficult times of her battle with cancer. Yet the Lord in his grace and power even used that battle with cancer for her eternal good. On Thursday morning, Jesus finished that battle for her and brought Thelma Kelly to be with him in the glories of heaven, where there is no more pain, no more confusion, no more cancer, and no more tears. Now Thelma knows in full how God guided all things for her good. By God's grace through faith in your Savior Jesus, I pray that the Lord grant you that same confidence in Christ that one day you, too, will be with him in the glories of heaven forever. May that knowledge fill us all with real hope until the end. Amen.