

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

The musical, *Fiddler on the Roof* revolves around Tevye, a poor Jewish milkman in a small village in 1905 Russia. Tevye wants to maintain his Jewish heritage, especially when it comes to arranging marriages for his five daughters. As events unfold, Tevye and Golde's daughters want to choose men they love as marital partners. Reflecting on this, and the fact that they had an arranged marriage, Tevye asks his wife Golde six times if she actually loves him. Her answers seem less than clear: “Do I love you? With our daughters getting married And this trouble in the town You're upset, you're worn out Go inside, go lie down! Maybe it's indigestion” “But, do you love me?” “Do I love you? For twenty-five years I've washed your clothes Cooked your meals, cleaned your house Given you children, milked the cow After twenty-five years, why talk about love right now?” “But, do you love me?” “Do I love him? For twenty-five years I've lived with him Fought him, starved with him Twenty-five years my bed is his If that's not love, what is?”

Tevye then asks, “Then you do love me?” And Golde responds, “I suppose I do”, to which Tevye says “And I suppose I love you too”.

Are there times when we feel we have to ask God: “Do you love me?” After the death of his wife, C. S. Lewis, wrote in his book *A Grief Observed* that it is as if God is so very present in the good times, but so absent in the bad. We can feel so overwhelmed and defeated by the cares and worries of this world that we wonder if God, whom Paul says works for our good in all things, actually cares about all the things we are going through. We look at the ongoing restrictions, uncertainties and fears associated with COVID-19, and we wonder why, if God loves us, this doesn't change. There is the ‘cancel culture’ movement that seeks to get rid of anything that seems prejudiced to or opposed to our society’s supposed enlightened thinking. People are defacing statues and forcing name changes on everything from sports teams to schools to public landmarks. Sadly, they are also attacking churches, feeling that the church’s heritage and negative influence has to be removed from our society. As we see this happening, we may again ask, “Lord, do you love us?”

Golde’s answers to Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof* may have been evasive: “I suppose I do”. God’s answer to us is clear. In this text, Paul gives us a powerful assurance of God’s love and grace and help in all things. I can’t begin to count how many times I have turned to these words both for my own comfort and for the comfort of others. Paul confidently says: *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” When we ask, “do you love me, Lord?”, the answer comes back loud and clear. He does love us, we know. There is no room for doubt, especially when we know all that God has done for us in giving His Son to deliver us from the brokenness and sin of this fallen world.

“Do you love me, Lord?” Look at the lessons today, and you will see that we are precious to God. The psalm that we used in our worship this morning calls us to *“Remember the wondrous works that he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered, O offspring of Abraham, his servant, children of Jacob, his chosen ones!”* (Psalm 105:5–6, ESV) Moses tells us in our Old Testament lesson: *“For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”* (Deuteronomy 7:6, ESV) God chose us as His

treasured possession. We are the treasure hidden in a field that Jesus spoke about, and which God paid the ultimate price to possess, as He buys us back for Himself in Christ. He has put His name on us in our baptism. He assures us that He works in all things for our good. It can be hard to see that in the midst of all that can happen in our lives. But we see the proof of it as we cling to the hope He gives us in Jesus Christ.

God works all things for good. This isn't mere wishful thinking. It isn't some sort of cliché to give us courage for our days. It is the confident assurance that God is at work, even in the things we cannot understand, to bring good out of the pain, the hurt, the evil of this world. It is the confidence of faith that knows our God has taken a broken world—let's call it a Good Friday world—and filled it with the hope that comes in the Living Saviour, who makes this an Easter Sunday world. Earlier in this chapter, Paul said, ***“For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”*** (Romans 8:22–23, ESV) It is true that we still have a ways to go before we get the full benefit of our redemption; the full benefit of our adoption. Until then, there will be those times of darkness; those times of illness and pain; those times of struggling as we live by the sweat of our brow. We're tired. We're afraid. We are sure we can't win. There may be times when we wonder, “Do you love me, Lord?”

Our Front to Back Bible Study has been reading through the books of 1 and 2 Kings. We just read how the king of Syria was warring with Israel, but the prophet Elisha was used by God to warn the Israelites of the Syrian plans, and so deliver them from the Syrians. So the king of Syria sent his army to capture Elisha in a city called Dothan. When Elisha woke up the next morning the city was surrounded. His servant cried in fear, ***“Alas, my master! What shall we do?”*** He said, ***“Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”*** Then Elisha prayed and said, ***“O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.”*** So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” (2 Kings 6:15–17, ESV)

Just because you can't see God at work doesn't mean He isn't at work. Even if the plan seems unclear or hidden from you, God is still at work for your good. Paul knows this so clearly that he says: ***What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*** Paul doesn't say that nothing bad will ever happen. Until the day the Lord comes again, we will still know the effects of sin in this fallen world. Until the day that we rejoice in the glory of heaven, we will find trouble and distress. There will be those who hate us for our allegiance to Christ, and they will do all they can to make our lives miserable. Paul says: ***“For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”*** Yet even if all the enemies of our lives and souls were to gang up on us and try to overwhelm us, they would still be powerless. He who is with us is always greater than all the enemies, problems and worries of our lives.

“Do you love me, Lord?” He does, you know. Paul assures us that God has called us and chosen us as His own. He has justified us—declaring us forgiven and free from the sin that would condemn us. He has glorified us by marking us as His own in Holy Baptism, and giving us a place in His kingdom. All this is yours because of God's love for you, for me and for all people through Jesus Christ. That's where it all comes together. Again, as Paul says: ***He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*** It may not be the flaming chariots that Elisha saw, but in the cross of Christ, we see the one who is with us; the One who is for us. On the cross, God worked for our good, as He gives His Son to bear the sins of a whole world. There, on the cross, the Eternal God shows a love beyond all telling, as He pays the price for every wrong in our lives. There, on the cross, the Lord of Glory bears the shame and ugliness of all things to bring us to glory. But thankfully the cross isn't the end of the story. Yes, that is the Good Friday part, but there is also Easter joy! The dying Christ defeats even death and the grave, to assure us that God can and will give us all things through faith in our dying and rising Saviour. He lives, and we have the absolute assurance that the One who died for us now lives for us, sitting at the right hand of the Father, working by His almighty power for our good in all things.

If you have driven around the area of Stoney Trail and the Trans Canada highway, you can't miss the construction in that area. The work to complete the ring road has left that whole area a pile of dirt; frames for concrete supports and the steel girders being driven into the ground. Right now that whole area is a cluttered mess and it is hard to see how any of this can bring the roads together. Yet, if the planning has been done well, it will all be for the best when everything is completed in a few years.

We may not always be able to see how God's plans will unfold, but we do know He always works for the good of the people He loves and calls as His own. He can do what needs to be done and He will do it. His work may take time; it may not always seem to be coming together. But nothing in heaven and earth can keep us from His love. There is no power that can stop His plans. Does He love you? He does, you know. You know it, for His promise is sealed for you in the Saviour who died and who lives for you. Amen.