

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen

If you look at the church year, it is divided into 2 halves.

- The festival half, from Advent to Pentecost.
- And this festival half centers on the life of Christ, reminding us of what God has done, and continues to do, for us, through His Son, Jesus.

And then there is the non-festival half of the church year, which we are in now.

- It runs from Trinity Sunday (a little less than 2 months ago) through the last Sunday of the church year (the Sunday after Thanksgiving)
- It focuses on the life of the church as it is strengthened daily by God's Word.

We have seen this recently in our themes for the past few weeks.

- Such things as evangelism efforts.
- Finding rest in Christ.
- And last week being in God's Word.

Another important aspect of life in the church is prayer.

- And tucked away in our Epistle reading for this week, at the end of it, are 2 extremely important verses that deal with prayer.
- And these 2 verses form the basis for this message here today.

There is much we can say about prayer. Such things as.....

- Jesus Christ, through the cross, has given us full access to the Father.
- Or....how God invites and welcomes us to come to Him in prayer.....
- And that He promises to answer our prayers in His love and wisdom and mercy as to what is best for us.
- Or even how we need to be constant in prayer to God.

But that is not where these verses are going today.

- Rather, they are specific to our weakness as we look to the future and how the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf.

For sure, as we think about it, forward looking prayers are a very important part of our prayer life.

- For sure, we can and should look back and give thanksgiving and praise to God for what He has done for us.

But much of our prayer life is forward looking.

- Dear God, help Joe to heal.
- Dear God, protect me as I travel.
- Dear God, help me decide on where to live.
- Dear God, be with my children on their future.
- Dear God, be with me as I continue to grow older.

You get the idea.

- And to that end, these 2 verses from our Epistle reading today speak to the intercession of the Holy Spirit on our behalf as we, in our weaknesses and uncertainty about our future, make our petitions known to God.

I share with you now again, these verses which do form the basis for our meditation here this morning.

- **“Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And He who searches hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”**

I don't know about you, but I don't know about and I can't predict the future. I don't think any of us can. And because of that, I don't trust people who say they know God's will.

- Now, let me quickly clarify that.
- I'm NOT talking about stuff like.....
- God wants all to be saved.....or.....
- God wants His children to do good works.....or.....
- Adultery is always wrong.....or.....
- Easy stuff like that.

I'm talking about Christians who seem to be quite sure in virtually every situation, about what God's will is.

- For this reason, I also don't always feel good about visionary leaders.
- Now, it's good to be a leader.
- It is good to have a clear vision of where you MIGHT want to go.

But the people I don't trust are the ones who leave out the MIGHT.

- They know exactly what the vision is that God has supposedly given them and they see it clearly out in their future.
- They are quite sure about it.
- I don't believe they know; and, therefore I don't believe what they have to say.

I also don't believe pastors who always have all the answers.

- Who speak quickly and have no need to listen.....or.....
- Are never stumped by anything in their own lives or in the lives of their people.

In fact, I don't feel good about people who say they never struggle because the Christian life always, sooner or later, means struggle.

- The people who are always sure of themselves and sure of what God's will is are somehow missing Romans 8 verse 17.
- **“Now if we are children than we are heirs.....heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ if indeed we share in His suffering in order that we may also share in His glory.”**

There doesn't seem to be any way out of suffering, struggling with Christ.

- Paul teaches that all of creation is subject to futility.
- It's still groaning.....in hope to be sure.
- Not groaning in despair
- There is certain and hopeful and eager expectations for the day when all of creation will be restored and receive full inheritance.

Not just despair.....there is hope.

- But hope is something you can't see....yet.
- And so, we don't see it yet.
- So often we can't see exactly what God is doing.
- We can't tell exactly how His will is working its way out in our lives and in the lives of others.

Paul says we wait with endurance and we struggle and we wonder.....

- And we don't even always know how to pray or what we should pray.

And dear friends, that is why it feels the way it does.

- Future plans, children, you.
- Dangers all around.

Ask these questions and uncertainty raise up to choke us.

- Because that is the way it is.
- We don't know.

Are you with me so far?

- I don't intend to be negative; but so far this message seems like a downer.
- But I ask you to please stay with me.
- Because now it is about to change.
- Now we turn to Romans chapter 8 and the last 2 verses of our Epistle reading for today that gives us comfort and strength

Recall these verses opened by talking about our weakness.

- When we are weak and uncertain.....
- There is one who is strong and certain.

God's own Spirit.

- The eternal third person of the Holy Trinity.
- When we are weak. He is strong.
- When we are confused, He knows.

The Spirit Himself, Paul says, helps us.

- He helps us because within our hearts that are filled with confusion and uncertainty, within us the Spirit is interceding for us.

You can't hear Him.

- The Epistle says the Spirit's groanings are not able to be expressed, but you, baptized and believing children, sons and daughters of the living God, you possess this Spirit.....
- And when you do not know what God's will for your life is.....the Holy Spirit knows.

He knows and He intercedes from within our hearts.

- The Spirit is praying to the Father on your behalf.
- For your weaknesses.

- And Paul says God searches the heart and there He finds the mind of the Spirit.

Think about this. God speaking to God for you.

- Asking that the Father's will be done in your life.....
- And Paul says in the lives of all the saints.

And so, you don't have to know.

- And you don't have to pretend that you do know.

The times may be hard and confusing.

- Okay. It's just part of the present evil age.
- The time when we continue to struggle and so often do not know....
- But the Spirit knows and He dwells in you and from within you the Holy Spirit intercedes.

He's praying to the Father.

- And the Father hears.
- And the Father knows.
- And that's why in the very next verse after our assigned reading for today Paul can say we know that all things work together for the good of those who love Him.....
- Even when we don't know.
- We know because of the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts and the hearts of all Christians.

Dear friends....there is great comfort in this.

- It means that you can relax.
- It means that you don't have to be afraid.

We weren't in charge anyway.....

- And it is very hard on us and the people around us when we pretend that we are in charge
- Great arrogance and great sins always flow when I insist that I know always and exactly what God is doing.....
- And that He must do it with this way in my life and in yours.

But Paul declares to you this morning that you are free.....

- Free to turn from that kind of grasping and panicky living.
- Free to trust God.

- Free to trust the Spirit even though we don't know what He's praying.

Ah...but we do know. We do know at least one word that the Spirit is praying.

- Abba. Father.
- Galatians chapter 4 verse 6.
- **“And because You are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts in order that He, the Spirit, might cry, “Abba, Father.”**

The Spirit addresses God on your behalf.

- Not Master.
- Not Lord.
- But Father.....
- And because the Spirit cries Father, we are not afraid and we cry Abba, Father.

Romans chapter 8 verse 15, **“For you did not receive a Spirit of slavery again unto fear. Rather, you received a Spirit of adoption in which we cry, Abba, Father.”**

- We are not afraid and even when we struggle and even when we do not know.
- We are not afraid.

Because there was another one, there was another one who cried out in a garden in our place, under our punishment, and for our salvation.

- Jesus called out, Abba, Father, let Your will be done.
- In love for you He submitted to the Father's plan.
- In love for you He suffered the Father's wrath for the sin of the world.
- He drank the cup.
- He died the death.
- He endured the hell.

And of this we are certain and we never doubt.

- This Jesus has made almighty God to be your Abba.
- And the Father who sent the Son for us has sent the Spirit into us so that even when we struggle we are not afraid.
- We don't have to know, because our Abba, He knows.

Dear Christian friends.....

- Prayer is such an important part of our Christian life.

- And when we feel inadequate, when we feel we don't know what to pray for.....
- We have the One who is always present with the Word of God.
- The Holy Spirit.

Today in just a few minutes we will have the adult confirmation of Dre Boyd.

- I don't know what the future all holds for Dre, just like I don't know what the future all holds for you and me.
- But I do know that we have the Holy Spirit Himself interceding for us with groans and moans too deep for words

I do know that God will be with you.

- That He will never leave you; and His will, will be done.
- What is proper and best according to His will that we don't always understand.
- Dre, your confirmation verse that you will receive in just a few minutes even speaks to this.
- This sermon and your confirmation verse were done independent of each other but they coincide. That's the way it is with God's Word.

Certainty during uncertain times.

- For all of us, the Holy Spirit interceding for you.
- God speaking to God on your behalf.
- Amen.

(Please remain seated) And now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

At this time we will have the rite of confirmation for Dre Boyd. I would ask Dre and Phil and Debbie to come forward and please bring your hymnal with you.

And I would ask us all to turn to page 272 in your hymnal for the Rite of Confirmation. No matter when you were confirmed, please us this also as a time for you to renew your confirmation vows.