

Sermon Title: **“All things work together for good”**

Bible: **Romans 8:26-39**

Where & When: at Gilroy UMC on Sunday, July 26, 2020

Audience: about 25 YouTube Live-streaming viewers

### **Opening Prayer**

We love you, Lord. We are called as your children. Nothing can separate us from your love. However, we are weak and broken. During this difficult time, we do not know how to pray. O Lord, please open our eyes to see you. Please be with my lips in your love and grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### **1. Apostle Paul**

Today's Romans Reading came from the lectionary for the 8th Sunday after Pentecost. Romans is the letter of Paul to the Roman Church. Among the 27 books in the New Testament, 14 were known as Paul's writings. Paul is known as the Apostle Paul. There is a difference between an apostle and a disciple. A disciple is a student, or a follower, one who learns from a teacher. So, we are disciples of Jesus Christ, as we are learning from Jesus Christ, and following Jesus Christ. On the other hand, to be an apostle has a narrow meaning in the Bible. It was used in regard to only 12 people who had direct contact with Jesus Christ's life on the earth. So, we say 12 apostles, neither 13 nor 20 apostles. But Paul introduced himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ in his letters. Because Paul himself had not lived with Jesus Christ like the 12 disciples, he could not be called as an apostle. In the Gospels, we cannot find Paul's name. However, Jesus Christ appeared to Paul on the way to Damascus. This is known as the conversion of Saul.

Paul's previous name had been Saul. Before Saul believed in Jesus Christ, Saul threatened and murdered disciples of Jesus Christ. He was on his way to Damascus to arrest the disciples.

Then, he saw a bright light, and he fell down to the ground. There was a voice, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." After this conversion, Saul changed his name to Paul, and he became an apostle to the Gentiles, who were foreigners. He established many churches through his missionary trips. Definitely Paul had great influence not only on early churches, but also on us, today's Christians and churches.

## **2. "All things work together for good?"**

This Apostle Paul said, "We know that all things work together for good." What do you think of this statement? Do you agree with that? He mentioned "all things." Even though I am just 38 years old, I have experienced some moments that cannot be considered good: shameful, sad, disgusting, heartbroken, weak, bitter, and so on. But, he mentioned "all things." Please educate me about life. How could all things in our lives be good? Please educate me about English. All things mean all, right? And what is the difference between believe and know? He said, "We know." He used the verb "know" rather than "believe." To me, knowing is more objective and obvious than believing. If Paul used the verb "believe," I might accept the statement, "We believe that all things work together for good." It is not easy to digest and absorb this meaning. Honestly speaking, I am still wrestling with this.

For Paul, many things worked together for good in his life and his ministries. He was born into a good family, and born as a Roman citizen. I know that it takes time, energy, and money to

have American citizenship as a foreigner. But he was naturally born as a Roman citizen and in a good family. He was well-educated, unlike other apostles and disciples. Probably, this helped him to write his many letters to the churches, and some of them were put into the Bible. He had the skill of tent-making. This helped him to do his ministry throughout his missionary journeys wherever he went, even through the churches' financial difficulties. He had many spiritual experiences. The conversion on the way to Damascus was just one example. He healed the sick, cast out demons, and experienced some miracles. He had many good church leaders. In his letters, he mentioned many of the names of his church leaders. Even in the early churches, there were many women leaders as well, such as Priscilla, Chloe, Phoebe, and so on.

However, he had other stories, because he was a human being. I believe that he had a shameful story that he might want to erase. He used to arrest and kill Christians. Many Christians were afraid of him, and they did not believe in his conversion. Because of this, he was kind of bullied by other church leaders at first. During his missionary journeys, there was a dispute between Paul and Barnabas, Paul's co-missionary. Unfortunately, they decided to separate. To separate or split is always a difficult decision. Paul spent some time in jail, not because he committed a crime, but because he made trouble with good news. He had weaknesses. We do not know exactly what it was, but Paul described it as a thorn in his flesh to torment him. He prayed three times, but it was not taken care of. I know that everybody has weaknesses. Paul was just like us, who have our own weaknesses too.

### **3. Jesus Christ, A Wounded Healer**

“All things” means everything. Then, can these stories work together for good? What does it make you think of? There have been many wars and fights here and there. We have shameful stories in our lives and in our history that we do not want to look back at. We still hear the cry of the needy. We have many tragedies like we experienced at Gilroy Garlic Festival last year. Now, California is the most vulnerable state during this COVID-19 pandemic. The numbers of the new cases and deaths are still increasing day by day. How can these things work together for good?

I want to turn back to the story of Paul’s conversion. When Paul encountered Jesus Christ on the way to Damascus, his life was transformed. So, I look at Jesus Christ. God became a human being. God suffered instead of us and with us. Jesus Christ has died on the cross. But it was not the end. Christ is risen! Christ will come again! There are many descriptions of Jesus Christ. I would like to share an idea, “The Wounded Healer, by Henri Nouwen, a Dutch Catholic priest, theologian, and writer. In our lives, we cannot escape from brokenness and weaknesses. We are broken, fragile, and vulnerable. Sometimes, we mess up our communities. Jesus was also broken and wounded along with us. However, he was resurrected from the dead. His way is neither to punish nor seek revenge, nor to stay in the darkness. His way is to heal and to go toward the light. Our suffering, our tragedies, our tears, our brokenness, our weaknesses, our shame, even our deaths are not the end. That’s because our Jesus is a wounded healer. He has already started his ministry of healing in us. Now, he is calling you and me as another wounded healer. As we are called according to God’s purpose, let us love God more and more, and let us heal ourselves and our community. Then, as the apostle Paul stated in Romans, we can say,

“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”

### **Closing Prayer**

O Lord, during this difficult time, we look at you. We remember your cross. We remember your resurrection. We remember you as a wounded healer. We remember that nothing can separate us from your love. Please give us the faith that, according to your purpose, all things work together for good. Please guide and lead us to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.