It’s All for the Best

Romans 8:28

*And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them*.

One of my favorite themes in life and the Bible is about not judging our experiences. In Matthew 7:1-4 Christ says “*Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. 2 For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get*.”

Although we know that Christ was applying that statement toward the people in our lives and those we observe, it is equally applicable to the circumstances and situations we encounter on our life journey.

I for one am very bad at determining the value of something I face. I am quick to make a judgment as to whether this is bad or this is good. A few months ago, I had a review at work and expressed my opinion that I felt like I was under a lot of pressure. Consequently, I started to tell myself that was a foolish thing to do; I should just smile, grit my teeth, and do my job. So I judged that review as negative.

So it was surprising to get a call from one of my Managers that they would like me to entertain a new position: one that is less sales oriented with more customer service, and with no pressure of making cold calls and no earnings based upon commission. So those pressures would be gone. I listened, and decided to accept this new position. They also heard me when I said I was the minister of our church so I had virtually no days off. So they gave me a half a day off on Friday afternoons. I work 7:30 to 11:30 on Fridays now. All this and I will make the same amount of money. What I thought was a negative review turned out to be positive.

I think we all tend to do that: we tend to judge appearances and then our emotions support whatever decision we have made. If it is a negative judgment, our fears, insecurities, and doubts take over. If it is a positive judgment then we feel calm, happy, and secure.

I believe that what the Christ is trying to tell us that it doesn’t matter what we are experiencing, whether poverty or wealth, sickness or health, God is in the background giving us the strength, knowledge, skills, and attitude to overcome whatever we are facing. As our Bible verse says, when we love God, when we are attuned to Spirit and listen to the Christ, God causes everything to work together for good.

Please hear that: when we have faith in God, no matter what we encounter is working for our good. Disease? – it trying to teach us something and is working toward our good. Lose a job? God is doing His works so that all is well – maybe a better position, maybe a complete change of industries.

No matter what we experience, God’s plans for us are good. We can’t always change what we see in our lives, but we can change how we see it. And if we can change how we see it, our emotions support us. We don’t have to live in dread and fear and anxiety. When we can see the world as an ally, we start feeling positive and energized, filled with joy and peace.

The Book of Philemon is a letter from Paul when he was in prison for teaching the power of Christ. He writes it to his friend Philemon and asks a favor.

Philemon 1:10-16

*10 I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. 11 Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. 12 I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. 13 I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; 14 but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. 15-16 Maybe it’s all for the best that you lost him for a while. You’re getting him back now for good—and no mere slave this time, but a true Christian brother! That’s what he was to me—he’ll be even more than that to you.*

So Philemon lost his slave Onesimus but is getting back a valued Christian brother. I like the phrase, “…it’s all for the best…” It’s all for the best that you lost your slave because you are getting back someone more valuable.

We could adopt that phrase in our own lives and it would probably help us. It’s all for the best Patrick, that you shared the negative feeling of pressure in your annual review because you have a new position that eliminates some of those pressures. It’s all for the best that your relationship broke down because you have been able to meet the beloved of your heart.

Now I have to admit that I cannot always say, “It’s all for the best” about everything yet, but that is only because I cannot alter the way I see things yet; I have not let the love and truth of the Christ enter my heart on every particular issue. In time God wants us to rise above every disappointment and hurt to find joy again. He wants us to see things in a way that allows us to do that, and He will continue to nudge us, guide us, and coach us until we can change our vision and judgments of the occurrences in our lives.

Our goal is to change the way that we see things so those things can change. Our greatest challenge to achieving that goal is our habitual way of responding to situations. Our habits block our hearts and minds, and stifle our imaginations. We don’t even realize it is happening.

I read that not long ago, a man sat at a subway station on a cold January day in Washington DC and started to play the violin. He played six Bach pieces for about 45 minutes. Thousands of people went through the station and passed the man.

One man stopped for a few seconds and then hurried on. A little later, a woman threw a dollar into his case and moved on without stopping. The first person who actually paid attention was a 3 year old boy. Finally the mother pulled the child on but the child continued to turn his head back toward the violin player. Several other children did this same thing. During the 45 minutes the musician played, only the children wanted to stop and listen.

When he finished playing, silence once again reclaimed the station, and no one noticed. No one applauded; no one acknowledged the man’s gift of music. No one shared their appreciation for what the man had done.

No one knew this but the violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the best musicians in the world. He played one of the most intricate pieces ever written with a violin worth 3.5 million dollars. Two days before his playing in the subway, Joshua Bell sold out at a theater in Boston where the seats averaged $100.00.

Joshua Bell playing incognito in the subway station was part of a social experiment. People assumed he was a street musician because he was playing in a subway station for handouts. They paid no attention to his music, perhaps because they couldn’t discern his skills, but probably because their judgments and preconceived conditioning prevented them from hearing what was probably the finest performance they would ever hear in their lives. We see no more than what we expect to see, so the passing people saw and heard what they expected to see and hear from a lowly street musician. Only the children had the innocent and untainted awareness to appreciate the extraordinary music they heard.

We can quickly reframe our thinking towards a person or a situation by changing the words we use to describe it. Instead of being “bad”, why not make it interesting, or an opportunity.

Prior to taking a general-knowledge test, psychologists in the Netherlands asked half a group of volunteers to imagine the mindset of a typical university professor. The other half imagined a football hooligan. The professor group got 6o per cent of their questions right, while the hooligan group got only 41 per cent.

This same principle of reframing applies to the body as well as the mind. Some researchers at New York University asked their volunteers to do a mental task involving words relating to old age, such as "wrinkled", "grey" and "bingo". A second group was shown words unrelated to old age. The researchers told them the experiment was over and secretly recorded the time each participant took to walk down the long hallway to the exit. Those with old age on their mind took significantly longer to walk down the corridor.

God is working to change our judgments and our preconceived attitudes and thought patterns. We can do our part to help ourselves by making a conscious effort to change our thinking, responses, vocabulary, behaviors and attitudes. With God’s help we can elevate to a spiritual level where we can release our old mental habits and routine visions and see things as God intends for us to see them … as ‘all for the best’.

Let us move into prayer….