

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

GOD IS GOOD

Ps. 73:1, etc.; Bev Brinkman Funeral; February 22, 2024

“God is good!” I doubt that there was a time when visiting with Bev that she did not confess, “God is good!” After giving an update on her health, or something else, she would end with, “God is good!” And this was no throw away comment, some meaningless cliché to her. God was good when Merle was suffering with a brain tumor, ended up in the nursing home a long way from home, when his abilities began to fail, and even when he died. God was good when she was first diagnosed with cancer and began treatment, when the cancer came back and she began treatment again, and when it was time to quit treatment.

Less than two weeks before she died, when I was with her to comfort and strengthen her with God’s Word and the Sacrament of Jesus’ body and blood, not knowing it would be the last time, it was hard not shedding tears knowing she wouldn’t be with us for much longer. Bev comforted me with, “God is good.” In a world that is not good and suffering with a ton of stuff that was not good for her, Bev confessed her faith: “God is good.”

I’m not sure that she realized it, but every time she confessed this as her faith, she was agreeing with what Lutheran theologians identify as the first attribute of God, His goodness. Holy Scripture shows how God is good, that He is kind to us, desiring what is for our good. The Bible is full of statements declaring the goodness of the Lord our God, especially in the Psalms. **“Good and upright is the LORD”** (25:8). **“You, O LORD, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who trust in You”** (86:5). Or, simply, how Psalm 73 begins: **“Truly God is good.”**

As [Jesus] was setting out on His journey [to Jerusalem to suffer, die on the cross, and rise on the third day], a man ran up and knelt before Him and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone” (Mk 10:17-18). See, Jesus agreed with Bev that, “God is good.” And the goodness of God is fully comprehended only in light of God’s Son, Jesus, suffering and dying to save us sinners, we who are not good.

One argument raised against the existence of a good God is evil in the world. If God is “all-powerful/omnipotent” (another of God’s attributes), why doesn’t He prevent evil from happening? How can God be “good” if He allows evil to destroy our lives? That is a serious challenge to faith in God. God’s Word does not try to gloss over that question, but faces it head on. How could Bev keep the faith that God is good in the face of all her troubles, which would seem to deny the goodness of God?

As I noted, Psalm 73 begins with the bold statement, **“God is truly good.”** The psalmist makes that statement while noting the challenges he faced in confessing that. He admitted that when he saw how well things went for those who did not care anything for God, how they prospered while doing evil and had it easy right up to their deaths, that he was tempted to doubt God’s goodness as he was envious of the wicked. In comparison to their easy and prosperous lives, his life was full of trouble. What was the point of trying to live according to God’s Word if he was still stricken?

In faith, neither the psalmist nor Bev could succumb to that temptation. To deny God’s goodness would be a betrayal of her children and grandchildren (73:15). To turn against God in the day of trouble would not change anything, but to confess her continued faith in God who was good to her was important for those around her, that they keep the same faith as they watched her going through this strife.

Bev was a compassionate person, but never showy about it. She was a dedicated and faithful friend to many, keeping in touch with them by phone and through cards and letters. She and Merle were chosen by many to be the sponsors, or godparents, of children. You want to choose as sponsors only those you know will do their duty to pray for and support parents in bringing up their children in the Christian faith. Until she had to stop it recently, Bev was a “pen pal” and regular sender of cards to members of our congregation who were no longer able to come to church. And shortly before her death, with the help of a devoted friend, she wrote two last cards to her children, Marc and Amy, something I’m sure they will treasure for the rest of their lives.

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Bev did not grow up in a church-going family, which is important to know about her. As a teenager the Holy Spirit drew her to Jesus as her Lord and, after receiving instruction in the faith was baptized and confirmed. Those of us who are blessed with growing up in the faith and can't remember a time when Jesus was not our Lord, might take faith and salvation for granted, but not Bev. Like the psalmist, it was always true for her: **“O LORD, I love the habitation of Your house and the place where Your glory dwells”** (Ps. 26:8).

Some people are concerned that receiving the Lord's Supper of Jesus' body and blood can happen too often and make it “less special” – as if the forgiving and saving body and blood of Jesus could ever be anything but special! Bev trusted God's promises in Jesus. The last couple of months, when she could no longer attend church, she requested that her pastors come weekly so she could continue to receive God's gifts regularly. She was always apologetic to me for making demands on my busy schedule. She apologized for coughing and not being able to speak the liturgy, but her hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God could be satisfied only by the good gifts of God in Christ Jesus.

If we find ourselves becoming complacent in our desire to be in the Lord's house and receive His gifts for us and for our salvation, her example will remind us that, **“God is good!”**

I encourage you to study Psalm 73. There are gems in it for us who suffer in this life. The psalm speaks of what faith in God is like:

I am continually with You; [nothing could separate Bev from God's love]
You hold my right hand.
You guide me with Your counsel, [God's holy Word was treasured by Bev]
and afterward You will receive me to glory... [where Bev's soul is now]
My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever...
But for me it is good to be near God; [Bev held to Jesus' promise to her: **If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also.**]
I have made the LORD GOD my refuge,
that I may tell of all Your works. (73:23-24, 26, 28).

Bev confessed what she believed: **God is good!** Amen.