

Romans 8, 28: "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

In Christ Jesus, Our Savior, Dear Christian Friends, particularly you the members of the bereaved family:

It is a solemn occasion that has brought us together this afternoon. We have come together to pay our last respects to the mortal remains of our brother in the faith, our comrade in arms, a fellow soldier in the Army of the United States, Hubert Kleibocker. Our Service this afternoon is somewhat unusual in that our departed left this life over three and one-half years ago in Germany. After all this while he has now been brought back to his final resting place.

The Lord moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform. I feel like it was by the grace of God that I was permitted to minister unto him. The more we think about it, the more we will be convinced of the truth of the statement of our text: "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God". We shall see how also in the case of Hubert the grace of God has been shown.

Let me tell you some of the details of the story of how Hubert and I met in France in February of 1945. The Third Infantry Division had established a Rest Camp in a little French town of Bourbon les Bains. It was a health resort, similar to Hot Springs, Ark. People from all over the country would come there for the baths. During the war, however, it wasn't used very much by the civilians. It was put to good use by the army, and served as a good Rest Camp. Soldiers from the Third Division would be sent back there for a four day rest. It was an opportunity to rest up from the fatigue of battle, take several good hot baths, and eat good hot meals. Church Services were provided every day for the men. A Chaplain was sent there for a period of thirty days to take care of the Services. I was asked if I wanted to take charge of the Services for the month of December. I turned it down. A little later I was asked if I wanted to go in January. I turned it down again, and suggested that I would rather go in February. So at the end of January I was on my way to the Rest Camp. Had I gone in December or January, I would never have seen Hubert. I feel as though the good Lord directed my decision so that I would be able to minister unto Hubert. Indeed, the Lord moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.

I had been at the Rest Camp for over three weeks and was making plans to return to my regiment. One day, the 26th of February, 1945, I stopped in at the Red Cross Club about one half hour before my 11 a. m. Service to remind the men about the Church Service. The Red Cross Club was in a large building which was arranged as a writing room for the men. There were a number of tables and chairs at which men were sitting, writing letters. I went from table to table reminding the men of the Church Service. I then went back into the kitchen to have a cup of coffee. I had barely sat down when I heard someone excitedly call, "Rev. Grapatin, do you remember me?" I looked up and saw Hubert. I did not recognize him immediately. I said, "No, I can't recall your name off hand, but I believe you're from Freistatt". He then said: "I'm Hubert Kleibocker". I asked him to sit down with me. We talked



about the people from Freistatt. It had been over two and one half years since I left Monett. I didn't expect to see anyone from the Monett or Freistatt area over in France. Hubert was the first Lutheran of the Monett area that I had met overseas. It was time for the Church Service, and Hubert and I went over to the auditorium. Hubert attended all four Services. It was during the season of Lent, so I preached about Jesus our Savior, who suffered and died for our sins. I spent a lot of time with Hubert those four days. I made several trips in the afternoons to some of our hospitals located nearby. Hubert rode along with us. (My driver was a Lutheran from Wisconsin.) We talked a lot about Freistatt and Monett, the Church, the Walther League, and other matters of interest to both of us.

Then on the first of March we were to return to our respective regiments: I to the 15th, Hubert to the 7th. Before leaving the camp, Hubert requested the Lord's Supper. I served it to him in my room just shortly before the time we were to leave. -- When you think about it now, wasn't it really by the grace of God that Hubert and I were there in the same little town in France at the same time. There in the little town of Bourbon les Bains, over five thousand miles from home, Hubert heard four sermons about his Savior and also partook of the Lord's Supper. -- Soon after that we had to leave. I can still see Hubert sitting in the truck, smiling and waving "Goodbye". I had no idea then that that would be the last time I would ever see him again.

I believe it was the latter part of May of 1945 when I was in a little town in Austria that I received a letter from Pastor Stuenkel, telling me that Hubert was listed as missing in action. The very first opportunity I had, I drove the fifty miles to Salzburg, Austria, where the Division Personnel Office was located, to find out about Hubert. I was very much shocked when I learned that Hubert had died in action around the Siegfried line. I learned that his grave was in St. Avoild, France, near Metz. I determined that at my first opportunity I would visit his grave.

In July our whole Division moved out of Austria into Germany between Frankfurt and Kassel. In August I received word that I was going back home to the U.S.A. I was assigned to another Division and joined them near Wiesbaden, Germany. In early September we started our long journey for home. En route to the port of embarkation, Le Havre, France, our long convoy stopped in Metz, France over night. I asked the colonel's permission to break out of convoy the next morning to drive to St. Avoild, which was between twenty to thirty miles away. The permission was gladly given. I arrived at the cemetery, located Hubert's grave, had a short Service, took several pictures, and hurried back to the rest of the convoy.

And so now, after more than three years, we meet again. That last time, in St. Avoild, France, I stood alone at his grave. But today his relatives and many friends are gathered together to honor and respect his memory. And that is as it should be.

But let me return to the text and speak a word of comfort to you, his relatives. Isn't it wonderful the way the Lord works? When you think of that meeting in France, doesn't it seem as though the Lord arranged it all?



It seems as though the Lord had said to me, "I want you over in that Rest Camp in February". It seems as though He said to Hubert, "I want you to hear sermons about your Savior, and to partake of the Lord's Supper. You will need it to comfort and strengthen you for the coming trials." It shows you how the Lord looks after His own. Indeed all things do work together for good to them that love God. I claim no credit at all. It was all the Lord's doing. To Him belong all honor and praise. You see, when you trust in the Lord, you don't have to worry about a thing. No doubt, you prayed many prayers for Hubert. Rest assured, the Lord answered them all.

The apostle Paul, in our text, is very definite. He says, "We know". He doesn't say, "we think", "we have reasons to feel that it might be so". He doesn't say, "we have good scientific knowledge which seems to bring about the following conclusion". He says: "WE KNOW". There's no guess work about it. It's a positive fact. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the word of the Lord shall not pass away.

Paul says, "We Know THAT ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD to them that love God." This statement comes from a man who endured all kinds of hardships for the sake of the Gospel. Paul had a heavy cross to bear, he endured many sufferings, much pain and anguish of body and soul. And yet he says that it all works out for the good, for the best of everything. We are to look upon it in the same manner. All our hardships, sorrow and affliction, cross and trial, life and death, all works out for our good. And while we do not understand it and may have many questions upon our hearts and minds as to why Hubert was taken; yet, as Christians, we will trust the Lord and acknowledge that He meant it in love.

These are words that I couldn't say to everyone. I couldn't say them to an unbelieving Arab family in North Africa. I couldn't say them to an atheistic family in France. These words apply only to Christians, because all things work together for good TO THEM THAT LOVE GOD. I can say these words to you, because as Christians you love God. Take these words to heart. They are meant to comfort you.

It is a good thing that you have brought Hubert back. As you go by the cemetery and see his grave, may you be reminded of the supreme sacrifice he made. Hubert, as well as over three hundred thousand other American youth died to preserve our American way of living. We often take our blessings for granted. We in America have blessings such as are not found in other places in the world. We have liberties and freedom that cannot be found elsewhere in the world. One of the freedoms we enjoy in America is religious liberty. We can come together in a church like this and worship God in peace and in quiet. You don't have to worry about your Services being disturbed by enemy action. You don't have to worry about bombs falling on you while you're worshipping. You don't have to worry about enemy planes shooting at you while you're on your way home from Church.

Do you know what it is like to be in a building while bombs are falling down all around you? I knew what it is like. I had such an experience on Anzio. An enemy plane was dropping bombs down upon us. They came closer and closer, so that we felt certain that the next one would fall right upon the house and kill all forty of us in the building. There was no next bomb. And so, by the grace of God, I am able to stand before you this afternoon.



Do you know what it is like to have your Church Service interrupted by canon fire? I had such a Service on a hillside on Anzio. I had barely started the Service when a shell hit nearby and exploded. I felt certain there would be more, and that they might explode on us. I suggested to the men there, that if any felt like returning to his dugout, he could feel free to do so. One of the men replied: "Chaplain, if we must die, we might as well die in Church." By the grace of God, there were no more shells, and we completed our Service unharmed. Can you imagine the anxiety that was ours as we wondered if and when the next shell was coming?

Do you know what it is like to have your Service broken up by an enemy plane strafing at you? I had such a Service in Germany. We were singing one of our hymns, when out of the clear sky a low flying enemy plane began shooting at us. We all ran for cover. No one was hurt. But can you imagine the pounding that went on in our hearts as we ran for cover wondering if we would make it?

I mention but these few among many such experiences just to let you know what you are spared by the sacrifice of Hubert and all the other American youth who died for their country. They gave their lives that you might have the freedom you enjoy today. Let us not forget their sacrifice. Treasure your liberties. Pray God that He may preserve them unto us.

And so come what may, remember that all things work together for good to them that love God. I think of an old lady in Alsace, France. She had lost everything, and yet she said to me: "Herr Pfaarer, Sie (the enemy) haben alles weg genommen, aber nicht den lieben Gott!" She lost her home, her cows, chickens, yes, everything she had; but not God. She still had God. And so, no matter what may happen to us, may we never lose faith in God.

Human words fail us in giving comfort. However, God's Word is rich in comfort. I recommend you to the Word of God. May it give to you the comfort you need in your bereavement. Remember: "All things work together for good to them that love God".

AMEN.