

Community: In The Circle of Life

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Pastor Timothy Hogan-Palazzo

Saint Paul's @ The Farm, UCC

Spuccfarm.org

"God is good, all the time. All the time, God is good."

If you've spent time in certain Christian communities, you've likely heard this call-and-response—a declaration of faith that affirms God's unchanging goodness regardless of circumstances. It's easy to say on sunny days when life cooperates. It's revolutionary to mean it when everything falls apart.

This past Sunday, I found myself living in the tension of that phrase in the most unexpected way.

I spent the afternoon finishing a funeral homily for a dear friend and mentor—a retired pastor who had walked through more heartbreak than most of us will ever face. Three infant losses. Decades of health struggles. Church conflict that left scars. The slow erosion of independence that comes with aging for both he and his spouse.

And yet, if you asked him how he was doing, his answer never changed: "God has been good to me."

Not in denial. Not pretending life had been easy. But as a deliberate, faithful choice to focus on what God had given rather than what life had taken away.

I was deep in that homily—wrestling with how to honor a life marked by both profound suffering and unshakeable hope—when my phone buzzed.

A text from another member of our faith community. His wife had gone into labor that morning, and their second child had just arrived.

The message began: "God is good all the time and all the time God is good."

I laughed out loud. Then I cried a little. Then I sat back and marveled at the timing.

Here I was, preparing to say goodbye to a man whose life testified to God's goodness through loss, and at the exact same moment, a new father was declaring that same truth through the joy of new life.

Beginning and end. Birth and death. The full circle, all in one Sunday afternoon.

My friend who died loved the biblical book of Job—that ancient, brutal exploration of why good people suffer. Job loses everything: his children, his wealth, his health. His friends insist he must have done something to deserve it. His wife tells him to curse God and die.

But Job refuses. In his darkest moment, he declares: "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth."

My friend also kept a worn copy of Harold Kushner's "When Bad Things Happen to Good People" on his shelf. He didn't believe God causes suffering as punishment. He believed God walks with us through it—present in the pain, grieving alongside us, offering strength we didn't know we had.

That's not the faith of someone who's never been tested. That's the faith of someone who's been through the fire and came out still believing.

There's a hymn he loved: "It Is Well with My Soul." It was written by a man named Horatio Spafford after he lost his four daughters in a shipwreck. Spafford sailed across the Atlantic to join his grieving wife, and when the ship passed over the spot where his daughters had drowned, he wrote:

“When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll—whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul.”

Not because the circumstances were well. Because God's presence made it possible to survive them.

That was my friend's song. And now, in a strange and beautiful way, it's become the soundtrack for that Sunday afternoon—the day I held both death and birth in the same breath. As I had already named the homily by the same title as the text message I received began exactly, “God is Good All the Time and All the Time God is Good.”

Most of you reading this never met my friend. You don't know his voice or his handshake or the way he made everyone feel like the most important person in the room when he listened to them.

But his witness matters to you anyway.

Because we all face loss. We all carry grief we didn't choose. We all can wonder, in our darkest moments, whether hope is foolish or faith is just wishful thinking.

And we all experience joy—sometimes when we least expect it. A baby's first cry. A friend's embrace. A moment of unexpected grace that breaks through the ordinary and reminds us we're not alone.

The circle of life doesn't pause for our grief or wait for our readiness. Babies are born on the same days we bury our dead. Weddings happen in the shadow of divorce. New beginnings emerge from painful endings.

And somehow, in all of it—the joy and the sorrow, the birth and the death, the hope and the heartbreak—there's an invitation to recognize something deeper at work.

God is good, all the time.

Not because life is easy or fair or free from suffering.

But because God's presence is constant. God's love is unshakeable. And God's goodness isn't dependent on our circumstances—it's woven into the very fabric of existence, waiting to be recognized even in our darkest hours.

That Sunday afternoon, I finished the funeral homily with tears in my eyes and a smile on my face.

I thought about my friend's unwavering faith. I thought about the new father's joyful text. I thought about how both of them—in completely different moments of life—had arrived at the same truth.

God is good, all the time and all the time, God is good.

It's not a magic formula that makes pain disappear. It's a choice—a daily, deliberate choice to focus on presence rather than absence, on gifts rather than losses, on hope rather than despair.

My friend made that choice every day of his life. The new father made it in a moment of overwhelming joy.

When we see the full circle—when we witness both death and birth, both grief and joy in the same breath—it changes how we show up for one another. It makes us gentler with the grieving and more joyful with the celebrating. It reminds us that we're all walking this circle of life together.

And the rest of us? We're invited to make it too—in whatever moment we find ourselves, at whatever point in the circle of life we're standing.

Beginning or end. Joy or sorrow. Birth or death.

God is good, all the time.

All the time, God is good.