

Theme: God is for Us
Text: Romans 8:35-39

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who has brought us together”. Amen

This morning with God’s help we will meditate in the Second reading of today, which was read before specifically verses 35-39. Let us hear one more time these verses: ³⁵ **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?** ³⁶ **As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”** ³⁷ **No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.** ³⁸ **For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,** ³⁹ **nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

Let us pray: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” Amen

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Friends in Christ, the first twelve chapters of the letter of Paul to the Church of Rome are the clearest and most systematic presentation of Christian doctrine in all the Scriptures. Specifically chapter 8 is a joyous celebration. It is a hymn of praise written by a man who, captive by his human nature and beaten to his knees by an improper use of the law, had been liberated by Jesus Christ.

We, too, understand his experience: certainly not with his intellectual and emotional intensity, but we do understand it considerable. Like Paul, we too have agonized over the good that we wanted to do but left undone, and the evil that we pledged ourselves we would not do - yet somehow did, and looking desperately for a way out, were set free by Jesus Christ.

Paul in this Epistle goes all out in testifying to, marvelling at, being grateful for the love of Christ that did for him what neither he nor others could do. He is overjoyed about God’s love, yet rational, too. Listen again to parts of Paul’s eighth chapter. **“The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”** He could not prove that overwhelming claim. It is a declaration of faith and an expression of hope.

In our own days, many people who suffer from cancer or other illness know days on endless days when they feel that the sufferings of this present time are larger than any “weight” of glory that awaits them beyond the grave.

Again, Paul keeps insisting that God is at work in all things with those who love him. Here in today’s Epistle, the closing verses in Romans 8, Paul says **“What can separate us from the love of Christ?”** He asks in his own new hour of

continuing hardship (arrested and headed for Rome). Paul insists forcefully—giving no quarter, allowing no room for debate—that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ: not affliction nor hardship nor persecution nor hunger nor nakedness nor threat of violent death.

That simply does not fit with reality; is our complaint in this age of deep alienation from God, and from one another. Affliction and hardship strip away the faith of many people as they go through difficult times in their life, or are persecuted or are in prison. Today in some areas of America continent—and in other nations – affliction and hardship strip away the last iota of faith of millions of hard-pressed people.

In our text, Paul speaks about persecution. At this moment Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the world. And this persecution is occurring primarily throughout the Islamic world. Christians are being persecuted in Africa, Asia, and Middle East. In Iraq, for example, a terrorist group named “the Islamic State of Iraq” are threatening Christians to kill them unless they convert to Islam, or pay protection taxes or face death by the sword.

Christian’s houses had been marked, and now these houses belong to this Islamic group. The leader of this Islamic group had said if Christians do not want to pay taxes or convert to Islam, they had to leave their homes without their belongings. So the Christians are leaving the city of Mosul without their belongings. And the Western nations are “turning a blind eye” to these atrocities committed against Christians.

And what about hunger and nakedness and peril? In our overpopulated, under-fed, world—a world divided socially and economically into what we call four worlds”—the people of the third and fourth worlds, literally starving and naked and in peril are so frustrated and angry and weak and discouraged they scarcely think of God at all. And God’s people scarcely think of them either, which is part of their plight—and ours.

So here in this text from Romans it appears that Paul overstated the claims of the Christian life. At a deeper level, that is how one might feel—and on occasion does indeed feel—when he himself is in the valley of the shadow or overwhelmed by the unconcerned or our society.

But to read the passage in a casual way is to miss altogether what Paul was getting at. He is not suggesting that affliction and hardship and hunger and nakedness and peril and the threat of death cannot cause ‘a Judas to betray’, send “a Peter to defect’, or lead him, Paul, for that matter, into sessions of deep depression. His eye is not on our faith or on our hope. Not at all. His eye is fixed on Jesus Christ.

He is urging us to look objectively at reality. He is testifying to what God has done for you and me and all people. Paul is not saying that we are able to love him with a love that will not let him go. Paul is declaring that God in Christ loves us with a love that will not let us go.

Paul is saying essentially in the first twelve chapters of Romans—and especially in the eighth chapter—that the only reason we can have faith and

entertain hope as Christians and the only reason that we can love God is because He first loved us. Jesus' love never runs out, is never selective, is never ungracious, is never arbitrary, and is never powerless.

Here is a clean statement of Paul message of salvation in Jesus Christ. The heart of it is that the Father of Jesus Christ is God for us, and that when God is for us, nothing—including our own imperfect selves—can finally put us down. In Christ, we can claim his victory over sin, death, and the devil.

Someone once said "Love is ... the essential activity of God himself, and when men love their fellowmen they are doing (however imperfectly) what God does." That is the Bible's central message: God is love. We are forever getting the cart before the horse, trying to love on our own. We fail at it as long as we are too proud to acknowledge that we are first loved by Another, the holy God, and accept his authority in our life and over all life.

It is because God loves us that we can, with critical judgment, put our faith in Him. It is because God loves us that we can have confidence in ourselves and in other selves to build the good society for the sake of the kingdom of God. God's active love is the ground of our faith, the sure reason for our hope.

Listen again to Paul on God's central activity: **"I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below."**

Friends, nothing, literally nothing, in all creation can keep God from loving us. That's the heart of Paul's message in Christ. Paul claims that even though we travel to the planets in outer space we cannot outrun the reach of God's love, and that the demonic forces in our lives cannot overwhelm the power of God's love. He is saying that no matter how many things we achieve or earn or receive in this life, no matter how important and rich we become or how hard our dying may be, God does not give up on us.

When Paul writes in 1st Corinthians 13 that 'love is the greatest thing in the world' he is not going sentimental on us. He is remembering the central activity of God in Jesus Christ: his love that accepts us as we are, his blood that cleanses us, his power that enables us to rise and start again, his determination to finish on the other side of heaven's line all that he began in us here and now.

Paul is also remembering from experience that love works in and through us; that it is, like truth, a constructive, recreative force. We also know from experience that when all else fails— persuasion, manipulation, threats, fears, coercion, force—love alone succeeds. It is the greatest constructive power in history and human experience.

When the prodigal son came to his senses —that is, when he remembered that his father still loved him in spite of, indeed because of his degradation—he saw clearly that he did not have to live with the pigs, that he could go home —and he did!

So it is with you and me. We are not destined to be degraded by self and society; we can go home to the Father at any moment. We can love God because He first loved us. We can serve God because He first served us. We can live in His presence because He is always with us in the world.

So, Christians—whether fulfilled or frustrated by thing of this life, unhappy of your situation, following or faltering, and in spite of all the uncertainty of life and history— make claims for Christ as sweeping as Paul's! Because God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

We, like Paul, dare, delight, and are constrained to declare to the world that it can be reconciled to God. And those who choose in their freedom to be reconciled—to love him who first loved them, to do his commandments, to take up their cross daily and follow him: experience new life as persons and take their places in the new community of people serving Him who first served them. It is the only way to live. Amen

“The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keeps your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour”. Amen