

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

August 16, 2020

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, New Mexico

Romans 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NIV 1984)

Inseparable

+ Peace to all of you who are in Christ Jesus +

If I want to hold something together, I will need the right product. Two pieces of paper can stick together with this simple scotch tape. Joining tricking electrical wires so power doesn't go out and no one gets electrocuted is possible with this special black tape. But there is one thing that tops them all in practicality. I just learned that duct tape first became popular during World War II when soldiers used the water resistant adhesive to seal ammunition cases. Today you see it all over the place. Holding up a bumper hanging off a car in traffic. Patching up your favorite lawn chair until they go on sale again. I can almost guarantee there is at one thing inside your home with duct tape stuck to it.

When I asked my wife just recently where our role of duct tape went, she told me an interesting story. I'm not sure how, but it made its way from our garage into a beach bag. So when she was at the lake a few weeks ago and a friend needed to patch his boat, she volunteered that unlikely beach item. But apparently our role of duct tape had been out in our garage for too long. So the sticky part was all gooey and the strings were all over the place. Not very useful any more. Not going to hold anything together very well.

Today the Bible gives us something better than any tape or superglue. Nothing **“will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** (Romans 8:39) Nothing. God's love is guaranteed to stick perfectly every time. It is inseparable.

Romans 8:35 asks us: **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”** If it is important that household appliances and children's toys hold together when we are fixing them, isn't it that much more important that we are held together in our most important relationship?

And here is one of the more refreshing things about this section of Scripture. It's honest. We want to think that bad things won't happen to God's people. But we simply know that's not true. We've even seen people succumb and lose the battle against life: a) college changes student; b) raising child with disability wears on a person after years; c) success

makes someone have no time for God. You notice that Paul isn't sugarcoating things for Christians. He's not promising an easy or carefree life or just telling us what we want to hear. He acknowledges life can get messy. Unfortunate and painful incidents arrive even in the lives of Christians, especially in the lives of Christians.

So it's not really a question of whether we will experience troubles as Christians. The question is if we will come unglued when they do. As Paul starts this honest look at all the things that try to tear us away from God's love he says: **"Shall trouble or hardship?"** (Romans 8:35) Those words have powerful pictures behind them. The word "trouble" in Bible vocabulary means something that is pressing down. The word "hardship" is used for the things that are pressing in. Paul then goes on to list some of those things: **"persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?"** (Romans 8:35) When life gets hard, when you can't seem to get out from under those pressures, when you can't get away from everything squeezing, when life starts to rip apart, what will you stick to?

Since the Bible is honest about our lives as God's children, we can be honest about how we handle them. Conflicts popping up because of our Christian faith don't disprove Christianity. Problems putting food on the table or paying rent don't cancel out what Christ did for us. Accidents and dangerous diagnoses don't disprove the existence of God. But they all create pressure. And those pressures challenge our assumptions. Those pressures are like the figurine you knocked over at Grandma's house, quickly glued it back together and hope she doesn't notice. Those pressures are slapping a sloppy patch on a tire after you borrow your neighbor's car and run over a nail. It's only a matter of time until those pressures reveal failures.

Troubles in life don't take away God's love. But they can cause cracks to form in my relationship with God. When trouble happens, my initial reaction is that God no longer loves me. Or God has already left me. And those cracks go back to my assumptions about my relationship with God. My assumptions about how my life should go and God's part to play in my life. I assume that God's love for me depends on what I've done for God. I assume God owes me when I have been good to him or followed him when it was inconvenient or when faithfulness to God put me in the minority. I assume problems in my life are caused by God failing to live up to his end of the bargain. Or God must be punishing me for some failure on my part. The conclusions I come up with are either that God isn't there for me anymore or God is condemning me for something I've done wrong.

Christianity challenges those assumptions. Here we get a resounding rejection of our automatic response to troubles in life: **"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."** (Romans 8:37) What is really broken is the belief that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. What's shattered is the preconception that all religions are just different roads leading to the same place. Here's the problem with those beliefs. If troubles in life put so much pressure on you that you walk away from God, then it puts all the pressure back on you to handle all those troubles. If you convince yourself God has abandoned you, then you have to rely on yourself to get through difficulties and challenges. If it is all about taking the road

you prefer, then you have to be 100% confident in your own flawless performance to get you where you need to go.

Then the best you could come up with for life is a whimpering probably. Self-reliance in the face of life's messes gives you the same uncertain confidence as patching a leaky roof with chewing gum right before a monsoon or using a band-aid to hold together wires on your air conditioning as the thermometer approaches 100 degrees or taking off your laces to keep your brake lines in place on your car as you go speeding down to Albuquerque at 80 miles an hour.

We need to compare the message God is sending us with the messages we tell ourselves. The Bible says: **"neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (Romans 8:38,39) When you are about to come unglued, when you feel the duct tape slipping away, God's love for you in Jesus is inseparable.

Jesus faced pressure in his life. Jesus had a monumental mandate from heaven pushing down on him. Jesus had all the skepticism of the religious leaders and all the criticism of the crowds pushing in on him. And yet, Jesus held it together. Throughout his life, Jesus had no permanent home, no place to lay his head (Matthew 8:20). Jesus suffered extreme hunger and thirst (Matthew 4:2; John 19:28). Jesus faced a hostile crowd in his own hometown trying to push him off a cliff (Luke 4:29,30). Jesus was rejected and threatened with stoning for speaking the truth about his actual origins and purpose in life (John 8:59). And yet, Jesus held it together.

And because Jesus was perfect in the face of troubles and challenges, his love for you is inseparable.

Ok, we need to address one other hard reality. There is actually one thing that could stand between you and God's love, between eternity in heaven and complete abandonment, between fumbling through life on your own and enjoying constant companionship with your Savior throughout all life's challenges. Sin. Doubts and rebellions, running away from God and thumbing your nose at his standards. But this is what the Bible tells us earlier in the book of Romans: **"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** (Romans 5:8) All your sins were taken by Jesus. His greatest love was in taking what could cause irrevocable and irreconcilable rupture in your relationship with your God. Taking your sins the cross means you are reconciled to God. The sacrifice of Jesus patches up everything between you and your Father.

What does God want most from you? Even in all the pressures and stresses. God wants you. God wants a relationship with you. I look at this differently as a parent than I did before. Parents would do just about anything to spare their children from pain and suffering. But your Father sent his one and only Son for you. Your Father put his Son through the most rigorous and challenging life for you. Your Father allowed Jesus to experience the worst pain and injustice in life for you. Why? So your Father could have you.

Nothing you experience in life changes that. There is no probably. There is no maybe in God's love for you. God's love for you in Christ is a no-ifs love. That makes us "More than conquerors." (Romans 8:37) Literally, hyper-conquerors. You have an overwhelming and superior victory through the warrior Jesus. Your victory. You are victorious through the One who loved you.
Inseparable!

So Paul can say "I am convinced" nothing life can throw at us can separate us from the love of God. This confidence isn't something inside your heart based on how you feel. It's based on God's actions in Christ. All the sufferings and struggles, all the pressures and stresses don't change that. God is for you.

I remember watching a commercial on TV that claimed to be able to do more than duct tape. Stronger. Longer lasting. Stops water leaks. It could be used under water inside a swimming pool. And it may be a major upgrade over duct tape. But is anything really guaranteed to hold together through anything for all time? There is no substance known to exist that can perfectly hold together every application 100% of the time. No human bond, no synthetic substance can form a bond as inseparable as the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

+ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen +