

DELAWARE-MARYLAND SYNOD, ELCA
Synod Online Worship Service
The 8th Sunday after Pentecost
Romans 8.26-39

Beloved, all: grace, mercy and peace be yours and mine from God and our savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

What then can we say about these things? Were you to ask my spouse, my children, my staff colleagues, they'd tell you that I often mutter these words, usually when I think I've seen it all and then the world, the church or another colleague hurls a curve ball that I never expected. What then, what then can we say about these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

At my lowest moments, when I think I'm sweeping up the sands, I have wondered - has God given up on this fragile experiment? The creation and the created? Has the church so let the almighty down? Has God gone to sleep at the switch? Has God forgotten us?

One need not look far to see all the troubles we're having. Income is down. Expenses are up. Our folks are unemployed. Our children are shut-ins. Our health – it's one thing after another. Our life together feels a mess. We feel so isolated – at home, behind our masks, away from the communities we know and love so well. I look at all the troubles in this mortal life and mutter, "What then can we say about these things?" Indeed, where *is* God in all this?

Intellectually, I know that God is present. In my heart of hearts, I believe and I pray for God to help me in those moments of unbelief. Still, after 17 weeks of being separated from the community of faith, of absence from gathering around the sacraments, where the only "in-person" worship gatherings I've been a part of have been at the graveside, sometimes I feel a gaping chasm between me and God, between God and the world, and it overwhelms. Perhaps, you too have felt similarly, if even fleetingly.

To us, then, these words of Romans become nourishment for the journey and hope for the living of these days. To those of us who wonder and worry about where God is in all of this, to those who feel discouraged, isolated and or down, Paul offers this glorious good news: God's love for us is inseparable!

Inseparable! Nothing, Paul writes, not anything "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." But sometimes we lose sight of that. We see our circumstances, we see our struggles, we wallow in the dead end of our sin, and we feel like God is far away. So, then, what is it that convinces us that God's love is inseparable?

In the explanation to the third article of the creed, Martin Luther says it like this, words that I've committed to heart and that comfort me again and again: I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead, the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and [keeps] me in [faith]...this is most certainly true. (ELW, p. 1162)

The Holy Spirit working through the gospel, the good news of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ; these remind us that we are inseparable from God's love. The gospel has power within itself to convince us of its truth. The Word gives certainty to our hearts even when we are afraid. And so Paul writes addressing the questioning of our hearts with the comfort of the gospel: "If

God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

God's love is inseparable. God, in Christ, does not condemn us. Even when others are against us, God never is. Even at the cross, where God's own heart was breaking; God, in love for us, saves us from sin, death and the devil. In Christ, God gifts us life abundant for the living of these days, and life eternal for all of our days. Even when life feels neither abundant nor eternal, God keeps God's promise. In such hope we cannot fail, in such love we cannot fall.

Paul had first-hand experiences of the adversities that accompany us in these days. Following in the way of Jesus, Paul never sugar-coated the cost of discipleship, and in our reading, he itemizes them: hardship, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword. Yet, he captures the essence of what we cling to, and know to be true: If God is for us, who can be against us?

We surely face a host of troubles in the world. Some we bring on ourselves, just consequences for poor choices or collateral unintended damage; while still others are unfairly thrust upon us. Paul recognized this reality, but in the midst of all it, he offers a word of reassurance: *“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 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.”*

Inseparable! Nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ, not health or money, not family or broken relationships, not job loss, not dreams that never come to pass, nor diagnoses that seem hopeless, not pandemics multiplied, not anything. God is here. God lives in you and through you for the sake of this world God still so loves.

Indeed, we have been called to faith in Jesus, for such a time as this. The Holy Spirit works in us through the gospel and enlightens us with gifts to share – gifts we didn't even realize we had until the need was great. In Baptism, God names and claims us as beloved, God's own forever, in water and the Word we receive the saving gift of such a faith, marked with the indelible cross, and assured that we belong to God, forever, no matter what.

In the midst of all that confronts us today – as individuals and the church scattered throughout Delaware, Maryland and beyond – today, I want you to hear that God loves, that God loves you and that nothing will, not anything can, ever, separate you from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. And so, we go then, to be the Church, the body of Christ alive in the world; powered by the promise that from God's love we are inseparable. Amen.

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