

**Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost – August 20, 2017**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

**Romans 8:35-39 (NIV)**

**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36) As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered 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 convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39) 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.**

Dear Friends in Christ,

The anecdote is told of a young boy who had agreed to give some blood so that he could save his sister's life. As he was preparing for the procedure he said good-bye to all of his friends, he hugged his parents, giving them a big kiss and then said good-bye to them. His parents were a bit puzzled by this display of emotion until it dawned on them that perhaps he didn't completely understand what was involved in giving blood. He thought that he would have to give up his life so his sister could have his blood. His parents quickly explained that this wasn't the case but asked him if he really would have been willing to die for his sister. "Why of course," he replied, "she's my sister isn't she?"

That's a pretty amazing example of love isn't it? Sometimes we hear of people who have been married for 50 years or more and yet they spend as much time as possible with each other and they still like to hold hands. Many people would think that's a pretty amazing love.

Two things that make love amazing are the depth of love and the length of love. Using that criteria, we'd have to agree that the love of Jesus is the most amazing love of all. Our text reminds us that as we go through life and as we look forward to eternal life that the Amazing Love of Christ will always be there. The apostle Paul assures us:

1. In every hardship we are more than conquerors through him who loved us
2. Nothing in all of creation can separate us for the love of God that is in Christ Jesus

During the last several weeks, our epistle lesson has been a section of Roman's chapter 8. In this chapter, the apostle has reminded us of some of the many blessings that God provides for us. He spoke of the fact that we can be completely sure of our rescue from this sinful evil world because Christ gave up his life as an offering for our sins. The Holy Spirit testifies to us that we are God's children. He assured us that when the going gets tough and we don't know how to pray that the Holy Spirit pleads for us. He spoke of the fact that in every situation God works things out for the good of those whom he has called to faith. He continues by asking and answering a series of questions to help us appreciate these wonderful blessings. Since we know these things to be true Paul asks, **31) If God is for us, who can be against us? 32) He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33) Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34) Who then is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.**

Our text begins with his final set of questions. **"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"**

The final answer consists of two key thoughts. First, In every hardship we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. And secondly, nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ, Jesus.

Who or what shall separate us from the love of Christ? Will anything ever cause Christ to stop loving us? Those are some legitimate questions. Our relationships with each other often change. Back when I was in Kindergarten, I remember being “in love” with one of the girls in my class. In fact, I still remember her name. But things changed and as I got older I fell out of love with her. That’s not such a big deal but sadly we’ve all heard of husbands and wives who fallen out of love with each other or brothers and sisters who have become angry with each other and no longer love each other. We’ve probably all had close friends who we’ve lost track of because we grew apart. Is it possible that something like that could happen between Christ and us? Could the Lord fall out of love with us?

It’s often said that you can tell who your friends are when you’re in trouble. In times of trouble, the devil tries to stir up doubts in our minds with his questions as he tempts us and tries to lead us into despair. He whispers to us, “Does God still love you?” And, often doubts flood into our minds at times like that, don’t they?

**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?** Paul’s questions need an answer, don’t they. Paul quotes from Psalm 44 to remind us that God’s children are not immune from the difficulties of life. In fact sometimes we suffer on account of our faith. **As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."**

The troubles Paul speaks about are the stresses and the pressures of life. They might be caused by our everyday aches and pains. They could be the result of rubs or irritations caused by other people in our life – like the hassles we have with our teachers or the other kids in school or the people we work with. Stress and pressure can even simply come from the grind of our daily activities. But, these are really just the tip of the iceberg in lives prone to difficulties, aren’t they. Paul mentions six more types of situations that grow increasingly more difficult and complicated to deal with.

- o Hardship – an inner distress that brings us to the point of not knowing what to do. Examples might include serious illness or surgery; family or personal problems, perhaps financial difficulties.
- o Then Paul mentions persecution. Just as our Lord was persecuted – so his followers can also expect to be persecuted. Jesus warned his disciples that they could expect to be flogged, or dragged into court, or betrayed by family members. **“You will be hated by everyone because of me,”** Jesus warns, **“but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.** (Matthew 10:22 IV)
- o As a result of persecution, Christians may have to flee for their lives. That would mean leaving behind their source of income – which could result in hunger or famine due to a lack of food.
- o Such a flight might also mean a lack of clothing – so Paul speaks of nakedness.
- o And of course there would be the dangers or risks associated with fleeing through unfamiliar areas – dangers such as assault or robbery or even worse.
- o Christian’s might even find themselves confronted with the sword and staring death in the face. The sword Paul mentioned was commonly used as street weapon. Thankfully ,it’s not a common occurrence in our country but sadly we’ve heard news reports of Christians who were killed in our country – just because they were Christians.

God doesn't promise to remove all these types of difficulties from our lives just because we are his children through faith in Christ Jesus. He does promise that we will be able to overcome them because our strength and power is from Christ and his power and love.

**In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.** In the beloved reformation hymn of Martin Luther we sing of this victory:

**And do what they will -- Hate, steal, hurt, or kill --  
Though all may be gone, Our victory is won;  
The kingdom's ours forever!**

The Devil's purpose in all of the difficult situations of life and death is to thwart the plans and purposes of God. Every time the Lord delivers us from a difficult situation – it's a reminder that the Devil has been defeated. We don't just escape from those situations – we actually emerge victorious! For those who are in Christ, victory is always the outcome. In every encounter with the old evil foe and his allies, even when a Christian is apparently overcome by death – the victory is ours through Christ who rose from the grave and who descended into hell and took captivity captive.

Christ is the one who loved us in spite of our sins. Romans 5:8 & 10 reminds us: **While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 10) ... if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! (NIV)**

In every hardship of life or death we face it remains true that Christ loves us with the same love he demonstrated on the cross.

**Who [or what] shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36) As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37) No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.**

Because of the amazing love of Christ: **2. Nothing in all of creation can separate us for the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.**

Once again, Paul makes use of a list to assure us that separation from the love of Christ is an impossibility. **I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39) 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.**

- o Death and life are opposites – yet we need the love of God to face each of them. Death brings us face to face with God's judgment. Life brings trials inflicted by men. Christ's love delivers us from both.
- o Angels and demons are also opposite. Do you recall how individuals reacted in the Scriptures when angels appeared to them? They were often filled with fear – but don't forget the message of the Christmas angels: Fear not, unto you a Savior is born...once again the amazing love of Christ sets us free from fear! Likewise, the devil and his angels have no hold on us either. The amazing love of Christ has set us free from their grasp!
- o The present and the future are also opposites in a sense. Once again, we can count on the love of Christ right now – in the present, in whatever situation we are wrestling with today. Because God is

eternal and unchanging the love of Christ will extend into the future and whatever situations may be in store for us there.

- o When our text speaks of powers it describes – mighty works or miracles. The Lord Jesus warns us that in the last times – false teachers and prophets will perform mighty works and signs – We can count on the amazing love of Christ to shelter us so that we are not fooled or lead astray by these false teachers and their powers!
- o The opposites of height and depth remind us that there is no place, where the love of Christ cannot be. The Psalmist praised the Lord saying: (Psalm 139:8 niv) **If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.**
- o Finally, Paul concludes: I am convinced that nothing else in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus. With this phrase, Paul plugs any gaps or holes that may remain. There is absolutely nothing, anywhere, any place, or anytime that can rob us of the love of Christ.

Furthermore, the love of Christ assures us of the love of the Father. In the love of Christ, we behold and experience the love of God.

A preacher from a past era was riding out in the country when he saw a weather vane on a barn. The words: “God is love” were written on the arrow. The preacher turned into the barnyard and asked the farmer, “What do you mean with your weather vane? Do you think God’s love is changeable like the wind?” “Oh no, absolutely not, the farmer replied. I mean, whichever way the wind blows, God is still love.”

That’s the lesson of this text. Although we are completely forgiven and enjoy a Father-child relationship with God through faith, we are still sinners living in a sinful world. The ever-changing winds of hardship will blow...but God’s never changing love will always be there using those hardships to smooth our rough edges, to purify our hearts and lives. Christ’s amazing love always seeks our best interest – providing us with the very best even when we would be happy to settle for far less.

Nothing in all the world is more constant and certain than God’s love in Christ. Rejoice in that love and rely upon it with the confidence that

1. In every hardship we are more than conquers through him who loved us
2. Nothing in all of creation can separate us for the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Amen.