

For Us and With Us

17th Sun. after Pent. – 10/02/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Romans 8:31-39 Pastor Keith Besel

v.31, Paul says, “**If God is for us, who can be against us?**”

Introduction

- ⊗ As we celebrate *Lutheran Women’s Missionary League* Sunday today, the message I’m sharing with you is one that I have significantly adapted from a message written for this LWML Sunday by the Rev. Dr. Ryan Peterson who serves as the Vice President of Administration at Concordia University in Ann Arbor, MI.
- ⊗ In recent years there have been numerous studies in the medical and psychological communities that have shown and confirmed that there is something powerful – nearly sacred – about holding someone else’s hand.
 - ➔ Picture these scenarios in your mind: 1) a brand new parent holding the tiny hand of his/her newborn son or daughter; 2) a teacher holding the hand of a timid kindergarten student as they cross the parking lot; 3) a brave teenager reaching out a hand to help someone who has fallen or been hurt in competition; 4) a young but nervous couple holding hands for the very first time on a date; 5) an excited husband and wife standing before a pastor on their wedding day, hand in hand; 6) an elderly, but tired man, holding the hand of his beloved wife of many decades; and 7) a family holding the hand of their loved one as he/she passes from this life to eternal life.
- ⊗ I remember when I was a very young boy and our family went on one of the first mountain hikes where I would be expected to do my own hiking in the Poudre Canyon above Ft. Collins. It’s not the easiest hike, even for those who are older, a 7 mile round-trip hike to the top of a mountain called Grey Rock.
 - ➔ As the youngest in the family, I had something to prove of course. So I started out very confident, but as the hike dragged on and things got steep and rocky toward the top, I was both worn out and pretty scared. But my Dad calmed my nerves and helped me along by grabbing my hand and guiding me to the solid granite top of Grey Rock. And at the top, with a stiff wind and a sheer cliff on three sides, I was all too happy to stay close together and hold hands with either Mom or Dad.
- ⊗ As I said, today is LWML Sunday. “Lutheran Women’s Missionary League” is an auxiliary organization of our Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. They truly are a missionary organization; sponsoring mission efforts reaching people around the world with their mites and working together with women across the country to help more people hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For decades, LWML has given a strong witness to how God’s love holds each of us.

I. Who can be against us?

- ⊗ As we consider the primary text that I read earlier from Romans 8:31, I’d like us to consider the two questions raised by the apostle Paul: #1, “What then shall we say to these things?” And #2, “If God is for us, who can be against us?”
 - ➔ Notice the main person; the subject; the one who is primarily “running the verbs” as we seek to understand Paul’s intended message here this morning. It is God!
- ⊗ Sometimes it’s tempting for us to think that our success in life depends on our grip, our hold, our own heroism. Though the culture in which we live teaches us to think this way, friends, it is a very slippery slope to look at life that way.

→ When our thoughts and motivations are geared around self-dependence, or as Paul puts it in Romans 12:3, thinking of ourselves “more highly than we ought to think”, we open the door to believing that we are actually the main people in God’s narrative.

→ But the apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, teaches us a different perspective. He makes it very clear that God’s everlasting love holds us. Our relationship with Him is not one of equal strength or initiative when we and God are holding hands. When we are insufficient, He is all-sufficient.

✘ So there are three significant points I’d like to consider together here with Paul: #1 - Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have no fear of condemnation.

#2 - Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have no fear of separation.

#3 - Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have the certainty of victory.

II. No fear of Condemnation

✘ So #1 - Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have no fear of condemnation.

→ Paul says, “What then shall we say to these things? 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?” (vv. 31-32).

→ What things? Paul has just acknowledged that God has done everything for our salvation. In John 3:16 Jesus Himself declares that God “gave His only Son, (to die in our place) that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”.

✘ Since God is for us, how should we respond? Paul continues in verses 33-34, “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.”

→ Why did Jesus die? To pay the price and endure the punishment that our sins require! Why was He raised? because the Father accepted Jesus’ payment. In other words, the check has already cleared! It didn’t bounce and it was not found to have insufficient funds. Jesus died so that we might live.

✘ And now, Jesus is interceding for us, fully engaged in the battle for us. I love the way that Corrie ten Boom, the Dutch writer, said it: “There is no pit so deep, that God’s love is not deeper still”.

→ Think about this personally, in your own life. Who of us in the past week has been perfect? Raise your hand. Okay, let’s try this question, how many of us have ever said things we would later regret? We all have! Here’s a couple more to think about on your own, Have you ever spoken to a loved one in a tone you wish you could take back? In these past couple of years, have you been divisive in any way? You see, we’re all guilty.

→ God’s law is convicting because the Law shows us exactly where we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That sin-pit is pretty deep...but God’s love is deeper still. His all-powerful arm is long enough to rescue us; indeed, it is His out-stretched arms on the cross of Calvary that did rescue us.

→ And those same arms were made alive again as Jesus was raised from the dead. Jesus is for us and with us. Even though Satan seeks desperately to accuse and condemn you, the action of Jesus is evident – and the result is clear: we have no fear of condemnation.

✘ The important mission of LWML shares this life-saving and life-giving truth with the world. As an arm of the Holy Spirit’s work, for many decades now, LWML has sown Gospel seeds!

III. No Fear of Separation

✘ That leads us to the next major point in our text. Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have no fear of separation. Picture that image I talked about at the beginning again, the significance of hands joined together. You and I might become afraid, or tentative or weak, but my dear Christians, God will not let go of your hand!

➔ In verses 35-39 Paul continues, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’

“No, 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”.

✘ Notice what Paul does not say in this text. He does not say that life will be free of challenges and difficult circumstances. He does not say that distress or danger will not happen. In fact, he writes in great detail, like in 2 Corinthians, about his own experience in facing so many challenges.

➔ But we don’t need Paul to tell us that life is filled with trials and tribulations. We know this from our own experience. We could all make a long list of our own struggles of daily living. Think for a moment, what would your list look like? What would you include? Who would you include? I’m sure that for many of you, the pains and struggles and challenges might make it feel like so much; way too much is stacked against you right now. But remember: in verse 33 God declares you righteous! And in verse 39 He says that you are loved in Jesus.

➔ Now, celebrate what that means – to have “the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” is to have the assurance; the confidence in life, that nothing can or will break the bond that ties you together with Jesus, the Son of God!

✘ Our Lutheran Women in Mission have served many people for many years who have felt like their lives were out of control. But God is always in control. And by His Holy Spirit, He has used these women – and the rest of us – to serve others in love as a way of showing them God’s love for them.

IV. We have the Certainty of Victory

✘ With no fear of condemnation or separation from God, we come to Paul’s third point. Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have the certainty of victory! That victory is Christ’s first. But it is made your victory and my victory personally through the gift of baptism. Paul says in Romans 6:4, “We were buried therefore with [Christ] by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life”.

➔ Here’s a simple theological reality; a truth equation: Baptism equals victory; permanent and eternal victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil. Paul says in verse 37, “we are more than conquerors”! The Greek word is hyper-nikáo (ὑπερνικᾶω); hyper-victors! You might think of it this way, we are super-victorious!

✘ In Martin Luther’s hymn that we sang to open worship, *A Mighty Fortress*, we sang about the devil in verse two, “No strength of ours can match his might. We would be lost, rejected. But now a champion comes to fight, Whom God Himself elected. You ask who this may be? The

Lord of hosts is He, Christ Jesus, mighty Lord, God's only Son, adored. He holds the field victorious." (LSB 657, v. 2)

→ Our victory is not secure friends, because of our hold on Christ, but only by His hold on us! We are super-conquerors because Jesus holds tightly to us. And so because of that, you and I now live each day – including today – confidently trusting in Jesus.

- ⊗ My dear Christians, as a baptized child of God, remain in His Word. In that watery gift from God, remember your identity as a victorious one in Christ. Celebrate the truth and certainty of knowing exactly how you have you been saved – by grace through faith, not in yourself, but in Jesus and the grip of His saving work for you!

Conclusion

- ⊗ It's only by His gracious work within us that you and I are able today to respond to His call like Isaiah the prophet and enthusiastically say to the LORD, "Here am I! Send me." (Is. 6:8b).

→ To those among us who are Lutheran Women in Mission, we thank you today for your hearts and hands that have shared the Gospel with so many around the world. Thank you for responding to the call of Jesus. Thank you for your example and encouragement to each of us.

→ So following in your footsteps with Jesus, may our God continue to hold us all, together in His love; "the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (v.39). Amen.