



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

August 28, 2011

11th Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon Text: [Romans 8:35-39](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Isaiah 55:1-5](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 42-43](#)

Second Lesson: [Romans 8:35-39](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 14:13-21](#)

This Christian Faith, One Word at a Time: *Inseparable*

Did you ever know someone that you couldn't tear away from a person or a thing? That person and that thing, they were inseparable. When I was growing up, my little sister had a blanket that you just couldn't pry out of her hands. She carried it everywhere. She had it all the time. Mom would have to try to sneak it out of her bed to wash it. She would have to take it from her when she was asleep to get it washed because she never would want to give it up to get it washed. In fact, when we'd watch slides at times at home one of the slides I can remember to this day is my little sister sitting out there with (I think it was) her left thumb in her mouth, and her right hand holding onto the blanket that was on the clothesline as it was drying. That's inseparable, right?

My sister was here a couple months ago when we had Tim's graduation party. I don't know if you saw her or talked to her at all, but if you saw her, you didn't see the blanket anymore, right? That blanket that she was inseparable with as she was growing up she no longer carries around.

Some of the things that we think of as inseparable...I'd never let that go...a lot of times we eventually let it go, right? That's just the nature of life in our world.

This idea of inseparable Paul now is developing in this section of Romans because as he is talking about facing suffering, which he had brought up at the start of Chapter 8, suffering and the difficulty we go through as we suffer might lead us who have a sinful nature to think that means God has left us. God is mad at us. God is punishing us. We must have done something to make God upset and now he has withdrawn his love from us. He has separated himself from us. So as Paul has been talking about suffering, he says as you suffer, long for heaven because your present sufferings aren't worth comparing to the glory that is going to be revealed in you. Then he says, "Don't worry as you are going through suffering. Remember, even if you don't know what to pray for, the Spirit is interceding for you with wordless groans." Then he says, "Don't worry because you are one of God's elect. God knew you before time. He tapped you on the shoulder and said, 'You're on my team' before the world was created."

That should have been enough to get us to figure out that God is not going to take his love away from us, but the Holy Spirit, who is leading Paul to write all these things, knows what thick-headed dunderheads we often are, so he has to lay it out plainly and absolutely for us. "Nothing is going to separate you from my love."

He says “who shall separate us from the love of Christ.” The love of Christ there is Christ’s love for us, not our love of Christ because then we’d be looking at ourselves. But who shall separate us from the love God shows to us, God as the subject, God doing the acting...that I can be confident of because it’s God who is doing it.

So he goes through and he gives us this list of words that are there and it’s progressive. If you looked in that reading, if you look at it, it’s a progressive thing that he has taken us through, the suffering that he’s talking about. He says, “Shall trouble”...the picture in this word is that the walls are starting to close in a little bit. Troubles are those things that happen to you in your daily life that cause you stress and worry and anxiety, the things that make you feel like things are getting a little too closed in around you and it’s making you uncomfortable. Is trouble going to separate you from the love of God that’s in Christ? He’s saying “no.”

The next one, hardship, takes it a little bit farther. Hardship is not just the walls have closed in on you, they’ve fallen on you. This is kind of the picture. Hardship...you get the news from the doctor and it’s not the news you wanted to hear. You come home and your loved one has packed all their belongings, and they’re gone. This is the hardship we are talking about. This is not just the worrying about what might happen. This is it happened. This is the stuff that just knocks the breath out of us, that makes us double over because the pain is so intense in these various areas, in our health, in our relationships, in our life, whatever the case may be. There are all kinds of things that can bring us these kinds of hardships.

Those I think you and I can relate to. We’ve all experienced that in one way, shape or form, haven’t we? We have things that we worry about, and we have things that in various times of our lives have knocked us down. Those are the times when we start to wonder, “Gee, does this mean God doesn’t love me anymore?” Satan is going to be right there in our ear saying “If God really loved you, the nature of love means he would give you whatever you want.” Satan at times is just like a little kid, right? “Mom, dad, if you love me, you’d let me stay out because everyone else gets to stay out.” That’s what Satan has done since the beginning, hasn’t he? “Did God really say you shouldn’t eat from any tree in the Garden?” He’s always been trying to get us to doubt that God loves us. So when we are going through this hardship, Satan wants us to think of love from our point of view and maybe at times our society’s messed up vision of love. “Love is whatever makes me happy. And if it makes me happy, it’s okay. And if it doesn’t make me happy, it can’t possibly be good for me.”

If you’re a parent, did you ever have to show love to your child by making him unhappy? Obviously, right? You know you were doing it because you love that child. You didn’t want to see them upset or whine or pout any longer than they already were, but because you love them, you stuck to your guns. That’s love. But when you are on the other side of it, you don’t want to think that’s love.

God’s love for us in Christ does not mean he is going to make everything perfect in our life and everything will go just as we want it. God’s love for us in Christ is what we

talked about last week. He transformed us to the likeness of his Son. We who often doubt God, we who shake our fist at God, we who at times think we are God and know better than God, we who belittle God for the things he has chosen to do...he still transformed us to the likeness of his Son. He took away all of our sins. He clothed us in Christ's righteousness and tapped us on the shoulder and said "You're on my team" before eternity began. That's love. And that's our God.

Now I said you and I can probably relate to the trouble and hardship, but persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or sword? I'm betting those are more what they would have faced at this level than you and I do. As he keeps going progressive, here's a specific hardship...persecution. You're being attacked because you are a Christian. It's a persecution the leads to famine. Why does it lead to famine? Sometimes how did the persecution happen in the early church? The Romans or someone else would blame the Christians for something and they would seize their property. That's one of the things they did. When they found out who the Christians were, they'd seize their property. If the government came in and took everything you had, could you see famine as a possibility, having a hunger in your stomach when you go to bed because they took everything you have?

So then you're on the run, which leads to nakedness because you didn't have many clothes to take with you and they started wearing out. Famine, nakedness...what's the next one he talked about? Danger. One of the specific dangers is the sword. The sword he is talking about isn't King Arthur and the sword in the rock, these big, long swords. The picture here is what a Roman street thug would be carrying in their belt. The Roman short sword. They are not using that for these epic battles that are filmed with Robin Hood and Men in Tights and things like that. It's the one that if you are going to be jumped by a thug because you're on the run and you're easy pickings, it's the one that is going to be shoved up into your intestines and twisted. That's the picture here. That's the kind of persecution they faced.

I don't believe we face that kind of persecution in this country. In other places in the world they do, but you and I are not facing this kind of persecution. I think Satan has become much more intelligent over the years. I'm assuming that the vast majority of us, if you and I are faced with staring death in the face, we would turn to God and say "Lord, help." I think that's where we are in our life of faith, right? We'd say "Lord, help me." Satan has kind of figured out that the way he can persecute us, the way he can drive this wedge between us and God is not through death but through life. It's the day to day things, like water dripping on a rock that eventually wears a hole in that rock, where Satan gets us to deny our faith or just keep quiet so that we don't speak up when we know something is wrong because we don't want to cause waves. We don't want to disrupt our life. We don't want to lose a friend, so we don't say what we know to be right before God. These day to day things where we live life, where we feel this trouble, the walls closing in, because "If I speak up, it's going to cause me problems." I think that's how Satan has become better at persecuting us. Through life, not through death.

I think if you read this you can understand what they were facing and what he is talking about. He's saying none of that stuff is going to separate God's love from you. God's love for you is certain. God's love for you is absolute. Nothing, not even the worst case imaginable for them or for us. Not even the worst case imaginable for them, that little sword stuck into your intestines and twisted, not even that is going to take God's love away from you.

Now you pick your worst case scenario. Some of you probably are facing it right now. You think about that and think about this truth. That doesn't mean God has stopped loving you. It doesn't mean he is no longer saying "You are mine. I have tapped you on the shoulder before eternity." God still loves you and has taken away every last one of your sins. He who did not spare his own Son but gladly gave him up for us all, will he not also along with him gladly give us all good things. That's in Romans 8 that we haven't looked at in our readings. That's the point he has been making over and over and over again.

It doesn't matter whether or not we have always firmly trusted that God will take care of us, or whether in the dark of night we've said "God, where are you?" He's not going to help us because our faith is strong or our faith is weak. He's going to help us because that's who he is, and he encourages us to keep relying on him so that our faith gets stronger so that we can have more comfort. That's what he wants.

Inseparable...just how inseparable? He says in all these things, we have won and keep on winning the most beautiful victory. That's kind of literally what this is saying. It's not like we are the one-time Super Bowl champions or the two-time Super Bowl champions. We are the everyday Super Bowl champions is what that is saying when he says we are more than conquerors. Each one of us here is the Super Bowl MVP because we are more than conquerors. And we are it every day when we lay our head on the pillow at night and every morning when we wake up. That's what "in all these things we are more than conquerors" means. It happened in the past and it continues to have an affect on us every day of our lives.

He knows what we are like. He knows how we are going to say, "Yeah, but what about this? Yeah, but what about that?" Let's look at the next list he gives us of these things that can't separate you. "I am convinced that neither death nor life..." Those are the things that we worry about a lot, right? We are worried about death. We don't know about death. We haven't been through it. We don't know it. It's a sense of loss. It hurts. He says, "Don't worry." Your death or the death of a loved one that is in Christ isn't going to separate you from Christ. And the difficulties you face as you go through life won't separate you from Christ.

If death or life isn't going to do it, certainly beings that are bigger and stronger and more powerful than we are could do it, right? Angels or demons? Can't do it. Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? They are there to be a blessing to you. There's no way in the world they could separate you from God's love. Demons, even though they are trying, they aren't going to make God stop

loving you. They might lead you to look in other directions and lead you to doubt it, but it doesn't mean God stopped loving you. It just means that you were a fool and stopped believing it.

Neither the present nor the future...we've taken the things we know in life. We've taken the spirit beings we can't see. Now he says time itself, there isn't going to be any duration of time where God's love won't be there for you. Nor any powers. We read the Gospel today about the feeding of the five thousand. That was a demonstration of God's miraculous power. He's saying any miraculous sign that could be done. Remember, Jesus said in the last days there is going to be false teachers that come and perform miraculous signs that might lead the elect away, if that were possible he said. But he said even these false displays of power that don't come from God, those can't separate you from God. So if someone starts performing miracles and they are teaching something other than Christ, don't even let that bother you he says.

Neither height nor depth...there's no place you can go so high that you are away from God's love in Christ, no place so low that you can go. Wasn't that the Russian Cosmonaut when they first orbited the earth? Didn't he radio back and say, "I'm in outer space. I can see it. There is no god." Evidently he thought you could get high enough where you could see God. He was a fool.

That list is pretty exhaustive, isn't it? There's a lot of stuff that he's talking about there. But God knows what you and I are like. You and I, we hear something and we hear someone make a statement and then we want to kind of take it like it's saran wrap and we want to poke a hole in it and say "Yeah, I can think of an exception."

When I was a kid, evidently I wasn't drying off enough before I got out of the tub because mom and dad said "Randy, try to use a towel before you get out of the tub. It's just getting soaked everywhere. Dry off. You don't have to get that much water on there. You shouldn't be getting any water on there." Here's the hole you can poke in that argument. I said, "It's impossible! You can't get out of the tub without getting a drop of water on the ground." There, I won, right? That's what we are like. We are going to make the exception to think we've proved the point.

God knows that's what we are like, so what does he say after he goes through that whole list? Nor anything else in all creation...now come up with your exceptions. You can't. He's saying "There is absolutely nothing that is going to separate you from my love."

Think about that. Think about the lengths God is going to in trying to comfort us and strengthen us. Think of the lengths. He sees what we are like and he continually tries to overcome all the stuff that we are going to do to look in the other direction and to be bored by God's grace. Look at how he keeps fighting for us.

His body, his blood in, with and under the bread and the wine to say "I love you. I've taken away your sins. That love cannot be removed from you." Yet we are still the type

of people that have better things to do and better places to be and this is just taking up too much of our time. It's just amazing that God still loves us. If anything should prove that nothing can separate God's love from us, it would just have to be a mirror, wouldn't it? We look at ourselves and what we've often done to God, yet every day he's right there saying "I love you. I've taken away your sins. You are my own. You were bought at a price. I've won the victory for you. Just sit back and enjoy the blessings of that victory."