



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

February 18, 2024
1st Sunday in Lent

Pastor David Ruddat

First Lesson: [Genesis 22:1-18](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 25 CW

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Romans 8:31-39](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Mark 1:12-15](#)

Rethinking Religion: Rethinking Trials, Tests & Temptations What Shall We Say Then?

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace are yours from God our Father through our Lord and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

We pray: Direct us now gracious Lord to hear aright your Holy Word. Assist your minister to preach and let the Holy Spirit teach. Let eternal life be found by all who hear the Gospel sound. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ:

Everyone has assumptions about God. They have assumptions about religion. But are those assumptions correct? We're living in a time when more and more people have more and more negative assumptions about Christianity. We might even have some assumptions about Christianity as well. So this season of Lent, where Jesus, through His Word, is really throwing a lot of things at us; a lot of things that are turning our world upside down; it's good for us to rethink our religion, to rethink Christianity because there we will see Christ for us. Today we're talking about **rethinking religion** when it comes to **trials and temptations**.

Last week I was invited to visit a friend of mine I have not seen for 20-some years. She and her husband live in a different part of the state but they were in Green Bay because she was facing stage 4 cancer. **What will you say then** to a young mother, with kids at home, facing stage 4 cancer?

Back when we had armed forces in Afghanistan, there was a soldier who had faced so many evils and so much corruption that he wrote on one of the walls, "God hates all of

us forever.” **What will you say then** to someone who has experienced so much evil, so much corruption? God hates all of us forever? What will you say?

You have a friend who you want to invite to church but you’ve come to the realization that her/his life and yours are pretty much the same. You both have stress at home. You both have stress at work. It seems like you have nothing to offer that individual. It seems like your lives are exactly the same. Why would they ever want to come to church at Morrison Zion? Why would they ever want to make this a part of their lives? **What will you say then?**

What you will say then is how the apostle Paul essentially begins this section in front of us. It is a reference to everything he had written about before. He has written about the corruption of humanity; how all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. He has talked about the evil that is here in this world and the evil that is in our hearts. But he has also talked about the grace of God that is ours in Christ Jesus. He also talks about how we are justified freely by His grace, through what Christ has done. He also talks about how, in baptism, we are buried into death in Christ and raised to new life. So then he says, “What, then, shall we say?” What, then, shall we say? In Christ, God is for us.

What, then, shall we say? He mentions three things. He talks about what God gives. He talks about what God proclaims. He talks about what God attaches.

First of all he talks about what God gives. He says, ***“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, along with him, graciously give us all things?”*** You know if you had a mom or dad who is worth that title of parent, they are someone who has sacrificed something for you. They sacrificed time, their money, sacrificed for you. You know that they love you because of this sacrifice done for you. Now consider God. In Christ, what has God given you? God has given you salvation. God has given you heaven. God has given you forgiveness of sins. ***“He who did not spare his own Son...”*** He gave His own Son for you. He thought you were more important to Him than His own Son, so He made sure His Son died for your sins and mine.

But that’s not all. In Christ, God gives us all things. That is a strange phrase. It turns everything on its head because we’re looking at ourselves and saying, “I don’t have a million dollars. I don’t have a huge bank account. I don’t have a nice retirement portfolio. I don’t make regular trips on my big yacht out there on Lake Michigan. How can you say I have all things?” In Christ, we do. We have a God who created all things for us. We have a God who created all things, who is on our side. We have a God who has given us heaven. He has given us a promise of eternal life in heaven, in a new heaven and a new earth. God has given us so much, but yet all of those things that I mentioned are things we have right now. We have a God who is in our corner every moment of every day because we are in Christ. We have a God who is going to work

out evil for our good. He might even deliver us from evil. But He will preserve us until He will bring us into what He has promised us; until He brings us into heaven. So in Christ, God gives.

In Christ, God has no condemnation. His proclamation to us is one of forgiven. As Paul says, ***“Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. 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.”*** Last Wednesday Pastor Enderle talked about how Satan is always accusing, letting us know how terrible we are, and accusing God as well. “God, you’re not being fair because that individual, Dave Ruddat, he deserves to be in hell for what he has done.” He is always accusing, but he can’t send anybody anywhere. Only God can do that. God isn’t going to send you to hell; He isn’t going to send me to hell, because of Christ. Paul says “Who is he that condemns?” Nobody can. Nobody can accuse us because we are found in Christ. God has made that announcement to you that you are forgiven and that heaven is yours; that all things are yours. The God who created all things is for you. No accusations in Christ.

He also attaches something to you. In grade school, we sometimes play a joke. We tape something on someone’s back and what does that thing say? “Kick me.” Sometimes that’s a cruel joke to play on kids. Sometimes it’s just a practical joke. It’s hard to get rid of that because you can’t reach back there and pull it off. But what do we have attached to us? The apostle Paul says, ***“For I am convinced that 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.”*** Nothing separates us from God’s love. It is attached to us. It’s not going anywhere. That’s important for us to understand because of what Paul said before that. ***“...we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”*** When people look at our lives, they might think, *“This person isn’t successful. This person is messed up! This person is making all kinds of mistakes.”* Nothing can separate you from God’s love because His love is for you, in Christ.

So no matter what happens, even if you’re facing stage 4 cancer, it’s not a sign that God has abandoned you and that God doesn’t love you. You go back to what God says in His Word: ***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.*** It’s not just God having some touchy feelings about us or God having positive vibes when it comes to us. God **loves you**, which means He does what is best for you. He is always in your corner.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God, in Christ. But you and I can separate ourselves from it. We can separate ourselves from Christ, and if we separate ourselves from Christ, all of these things I mentioned are also there. We separate ourselves from

Christ when we're not in God's Word, when we're not receiving the Lord's Supper, when we're not in worship with our brothers and sisters in Christ. It's a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God without Christ.

For that, brothers and sisters, we need to repent of thinking that somehow, somehow the things of our past, the actions of our past, maybe we were baptized, we were confirmed, maybe we went to church at one time and now we don't need to go to church as often; we can separate ourselves from the love of Christ when we separate ourselves from Christ. So don't do that, brothers and sisters. Don't separate yourself from Christ.

Oftentimes when people have strayed and they come back to church, they ask a question, "Shouldn't I be baptized again? It didn't seem like the last baptism stuck." That's not true. We don't baptize again. There is one baptism. God has not left us in Christ. We abandon, we pull ourselves away from Christ, but God doesn't pull away from His promises. So when a brother or sister comes back, like that prodigal son, there God is with open arms and says, "Here it is, all again, for you. Here is this gift; all things for you. Here is this proclamation. No condemnation for you! Here is my love for you."

What shall we say then? What do we say then to our friend when it seems like there is no difference in our lives, between their life and ours? "We have Christ for us. Come to Morrison Zion and hear about Christ for you. Come and become a member so you can receive Christ in body and blood, for you. When struggling with the trials and the difficulties of life, here is Christ, for you." That's what we say when faced with trials and temptations and struggles. In Christ, God is for us. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.