

Nothing will separate us from the love of God

Bible reference for sermon Romans 8:38–39

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ 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.

Today's sermon was written jointly by Pastor Nev and myself. Any jokes contained within are his.

Let's pray: Gracious God, strengthen our faith through your living Word, that we may trust your promises and rejoice that nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus. Amen.

In today's reading from Romans, Paul speaks one of the greatest promises in the Bible:

"For I am convinced 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."

These verses are among the most loved in all of Scripture. They are often read at funerals because they speak so powerfully into the reality of death. But they are not only words for funerals. They are words for every day when life feels uncertain, when grief overwhelms us, when illness comes, when relationships break down, when anxiety creeps in, or when we wonder where God is. These verses remind us that the power of God in Jesus Christ is always a power that brings life and defeats the would-be power of death.

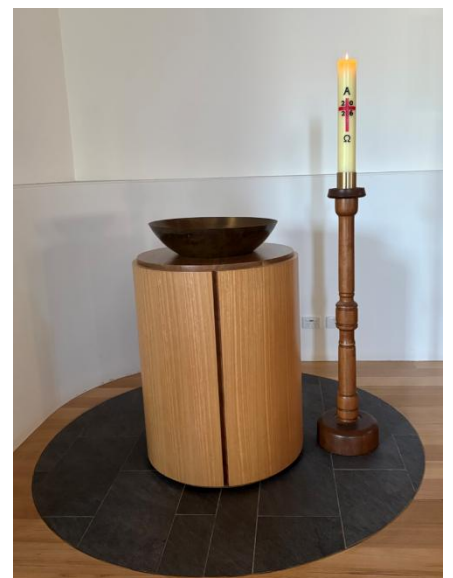
I love being a Lutheran Christian because I've been taught the gospel.

God for me. God on the cross—for me.

I've been taught that the gospel isn't simply good advice about how to live. It is the good news of what God has already done for us in Jesus Christ. It is, as Paul says, the very power of God that saves.

And this morning we saw that gospel with our own eyes in Evie's baptism. Through something as ordinary as water joined to God's extraordinary Word, God acted.

God claimed Evie as his own. God wrapped her in the victory of Christ over sin, death and the evil one. God gave promises that neither Evie nor her family could manufacture for themselves.



It's important that we remember our own baptisms too. Not because baptism is about something we have done for God, but because it reminds us of what God has done for us. Because there are many times in life when we feel powerless. Grief can leave us powerless. Illness can leave us powerless. Our own sin can leave us powerless. Fear of the future can leave us powerless.

Paul knew that. The Christians in Rome knew that. That is why Paul wrote this letter—to proclaim the power of God at work in and for his people. Martin Luther loved the book of Romans. It was through Romans that the gospel became wonderfully clear to him. After years of trying to earn God's favour, Luther discovered what Paul had been saying all along: **salvation is God's gift from beginning to end.**

Paul announces it right at the beginning of the letter:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..." (Romans 1:16)

Not human power. Not my goodness. Not my determination. God's saving power—for me and for all people—through the gospel.

There are times when we wonder whether we are under spiritual attack. Although defeated through Christ's death and resurrection, Satan still seeks to draw people away from Christ. But Satan is a defeated enemy. That's why Luther encouraged Christians every day to return to Christ in repentance—to drown the old sinful self and rise again to the new life already given in baptism. Every day we return to God's promises rather than relying on our own strength. Paul doesn't mince his words. Earlier in Romans he reminds us: *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* All. No exceptions. Like the serpent in the garden, you and I don't have a leg to stand on! (Boom boom!)

Luther knew that only too well. He knew the weight of his own sin. He knew that "the wages of sin is death." He feared God's judgement, and Satan delighted in keeping him trapped in fear and despair. But God acted. Paul tells us that we are justified—declared righteous—not because of anything we have achieved, but by God's grace as a gift through Jesus Christ. Justified is a courtroom word. The case has been heard. The verdict has been delivered. The sentence has been carried out. Not upon us—but upon Christ. The price for sin has been paid once and for all on the cross.

Throughout Romans Paul keeps returning to this wonderful truth: God's saving action always comes first. God's grace always comes first. God's love always comes first. Then, as Paul reaches chapters 5 to 8, he begins speaking honestly about what it is like to live as Christians in the real world. He begins chapter 5 with these beautiful words:

"Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Peace with God. Not because our lives are perfect. Not because our faith is perfect. But because Christ is faithful.

Then chapter 8 begins with another astonishing declaration:

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

No condemnation. Not less condemnation.

Not temporary condemnation. No condemnation.

It seems abundantly clear that God wants his people to live with assurance rather than fear. God's gifts, received in faith, are sure because they depend upon God's faithfulness, not ours. And God continues to work this saving power in us through the gift of the Holy Spirit. That same Spirit was given to Evie this morning in baptism. The same Spirit continues to work through God's Word, pointing us away from ourselves and always back to Christ. So whenever Evie begins to wonder who she is, her family can remind her of Paul's wonderful words: *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"*

But Paul, Luther, and every Christian who has ever lived also know that there are opposing powers still very much at work in the life of the believer. I once knew a devout Christian who was convinced that he had become a perfect new creation in Christ who no longer sinned. He sincerely believed it. We talked about it because that belief had led him to make some very harsh and hurtful judgements about other Christians. Ironically, those judgements were themselves sinful. He was a sincere Christian. He loved Jesus. But he continued to sin. So do I. So do you. That is exactly Paul's experience in Romans 7. With remarkable honesty, Paul describes the ongoing struggle with sin.

"I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."

Can anyone relate to that? I can. We know the good we want to do, yet somehow we fall short. We say words we wish we hadn't spoken. We fail to show love when we should. We ignore opportunities to serve. We hurt those closest to us.

Paul doesn't pretend this struggle disappears simply because we become Christians. Sin remains a power in our lives. It continues to accuse us. It continues to distort relationships. It continues to tempt us away from trusting God's promises. As we heard a few weeks ago, Paul cries out:

"What a wretched person I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

The answer is not found by looking deeper within ourselves. It is found by looking outside ourselves—to Christ.

That is one of the great gifts of our Lutheran understanding of the gospel. When we are burdened by sin, we don't ask, "Have I believed enough? Am I good enough? Is my faith strong enough?" Instead, we look to Christ. We look to the cross. We remember our baptism. We hear once again the promises of the gospel. Our assurance rests not in the strength of our faith but in the faithfulness of the one who made the promise. That is why the Holy Spirit is such a precious gift.

Earlier in Romans 8 Paul says: ***"The Spirit helps us in our weakness."*** Sometimes life becomes so overwhelming that we don't even know how to pray. There are no words. Only tears. Only silence. Only sighs. Paul says that in those moments the Spirit intercedes for us

with groans too deep for words. What a beautiful picture. When we have nothing left to say, the Spirit is still praying for us. When our faith feels weak, God's Spirit remains faithful. When we cannot hold onto God, God is holding onto us. That is why Paul can ask those wonderful questions near the end of the chapter:

"If God is for us, who can be against us?"

"Who will bring any charge against God's elect?" "Who is to condemn?"

The answer is always the same. No one. Nothing. Because Christ has already died for us. Christ has already been raised for us. Christ now intercedes for us.

And then Paul reaches this magnificent conclusion:

"For I am convinced 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."

Death. Life. The present. The future. Spiritual powers. The unknown. In other words, everything we fear. But none of them has the power to separate us from Christ. Death is the great separator. We grieve deeply when those we love die. We know the pain of that separation. Yet even death cannot have the final word. Because Christ has already defeated death. Life—not death—is what finally defines us. That is why the sign of the cross was traced over Evie today. That sign says she belongs to Christ. That promise says her future is secure. That promise is true for every one of us who have been baptised into Christ. And it is why we can face both today's challenges and tomorrow's uncertainties with hope. Not because we are strong. But because God is faithful. Not because we always hold tightly to him. But because he never lets go of us. Nothing.

Not our failures.

Not our sin.

Not our doubts.

Not our fears.

Not our suffering.

Not even death itself.

Nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nothing?

Nothing.

Amen.

Video of the service including the above address can be found on the St Paul's Lutheran Church Youtube page <https://www.youtube.com/@stpaulslutheranchurchboxhi1133>