

Romans 8:35-39

³⁵What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶Just as it is written:

For your sake we are being put to death all day long.

We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither things present nor things to come, nor powerful forces, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You Are Not Alone

I.

Blank, expressionless, mask-covered faces pass you by anonymously everywhere you go these days. Though surrounded at times by hundreds of people, you can feel so alone. Sometimes you wonder whether the face behind the mask is someone you know, but you don't really want to ask. After all, these days everyone is trying to keep more than an arm's length apart—six feet, is the rule.

“We're all in this together!” That's a phrase I've heard a lot lately. But it doesn't feel like it when you can't tell whether the person you are passing has a smile or a frown. It doesn't feel like it when you can't offer a friend in need a sympathetic hug of reassurance.

Alone. Have you ever felt alone? Loneliness for many in these days of Covid is overpowering.

It isn't just Covid that brings a sense of loneliness, a sense of being alone, is it? There are lots of other sicknesses. Even with the support of family and friends, each person must face certain aspects of illness alone. There are plenty of things besides illness that make people feel alone. Loss of job; loss of spouse; even things other people might see as trivial can make you feel very much alone.

Sometimes when you feel alone you pull back. Not just because you have the virus and are told you need to stay away from others, but because you don't want to feel like a burden to others. Perhaps you just want to carry your own weight. Perhaps it is your personality to just suffer in silence.

You self-isolate. You separate.

II.

“What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” (Romans 8:35, EHV).

Academically, we know the answers to Paul's questions. “Nothing!” comes our positive and fervent answer.

Then the rubber meets the road. We run up against specifics and we find ourselves shaken.

Troubles in relationships between husband and wife, or parents and children, or the people you once thought were friends who now avoid you because you don't think the right way. All the other aches and pains and irritations of life.

The distress of illness. Maybe it's the one currently occupying all the headlines, but just as likely you have to face the distress of some other illness.

Persecution. If you *believe* the things the Bible says about so many of the topics that

dominate our culture and you are willing to *speak* about what you believe, you will face persecution.

Famine or nakedness or danger or sword. Financial crises. Your job being eliminated because your business shut down or just can't continue at previous levels. Just being at the wrong place at the wrong time and being caught up in riots and unrest.

"What will separate us?" Really, Paul? All kinds of things are out there threatening every day.

But what did I say a little while ago? Sometimes when you *feel* alone *you* pull back.

It only *seems* as though Christ has separated from you. "Just as it is written: For your sake we are being put to death all day long. We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered" (Romans 8:36, EHV). Paul quotes Psalm 44. God never promised to take away every problem of life. They are still there, but *he* has not and will not abandon us.

III.

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37, EHV).

This is the reason we exist as Holy Trinity Lutheran Church. This is why we maintain a Christian School. *Feelings* can be mistaken. Sometimes it *feels* as though Christ has pulled away from you—separated from you.

Mr. Scherschel, who will be installed today, just like every other called worker of this congregation and all its ministries, is here to remind you of the facts—facts like those Paul points to in our text. "In all these things we are more than conquerors." Not just in *some* of these trials of life, but in *all* of them. And we don't just conquer—we *more* than conquer. The Greek word has the concept of not just winning a victory, but a *supreme* victory.

No matter how forcefully Satan might attack us with the facts of our disobedience to God, we have a defense. Our worst sins cannot defeat us, because on the cross Jesus already defeated all of them. Jesus brought victory over sin and Satan and all the troubles and worries of life.

Even now we participate in that supreme victory. Right this minute, despite how you might feel at the moment, your sins have been paid for. You have the triumph of sins forgiven. Right now you are more than a conqueror.

IV.

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither things present nor things to come, nor powerful forces, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39, EHV).

Separation from the love of Christ is an impossibility. Jesus already loved you so much that he stretched his arms out on the cross and died for you.

Neither death nor life. Life looks forward to the ultimate love of God in Christ when we will go to heaven. Not even physical death can separate us from that life.

Neither angels nor rulers. Angels would *never* try to separate you from God. But once Paul said: "Even if we or an angel from heaven would preach any gospel other than the one we preached to you—a curse on him!" (Galatians 1:8, EHV). No angel would try to separate you from God, but even if one were to try, Paul insists they *could not* succeed. Rulers all over the place try hard to restrict people from worship, but they cannot separate you from God and his love. Rulers could also refer to evil angels, as some translations have suggested. No spawn of Satan can keep God's love away from you.

Neither things present nor things to come. Time cannot affect God's love for you. As Paul said in a verse before our text: "Those God foreknew, he also predestined...³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called. Those he called, he also justified. And those he justified, he also glorified" (Romans 8:29–30, EHV). God has known from eternity of his love for you—love in which he sent Jesus to be your Savior. You have been called. No outside force can ever affect that.

Nor powerful forces. Jesus said that in the Last Days "False Christs and false prophets will arise and will perform great signs and wonders so as to deceive even the elect, if it were possible" (Matthew 24:24, EHV). But even these cannot separate you from God's love.

Neither height nor depth nor anything else in creation. No loopholes remain. No matter what you can think of, nothing in all of God's creation is capable of taking God's love away from you.

Paul wants you to be sure of it. You are not alone. This is why we gather together. This is why we emphasize the facts of God's Word over any feelings that might deceive. God will never leave you or forsake you. Knowing that, you are prepared to tackle whatever the rest of 2020 brings. Put a smile under your mask. Draw a smile on your mask. You are not alone. God is with you. Amen.