

First Sunday in Lent; February 18, 2024  
Romans 8:31-39  
“Nothing Comes between Us and this Love”

**What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him?**

**Who will bring an accusation against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies! Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus, who died, and more than that, was raised to life, is the one who is at God’s right hand and who is interceding for us! What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble or distress, or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 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.**

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

**For I am convinced that neither life nor death, neither angels nor rulers, neither things present nor things to come, nor powerful forces, neither 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.**

Even as he climbed the mountain with his son, his only son, whom he loved, Isaac, Abraham had an idea of how this would end. [Isaac] said, “Here is the fire and wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham said, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And God did. In the end, the Angel of the Lord held back Abraham’s knife from his only, beloved, son Isaac and provided a young from God for the sacrifice.

There is every reason to believe that the Angel of the Lord who supplied that offering for Abraham is the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God. Two millennia later, the Angel of the Lord took on human flesh and came into our world as Jesus Christ. He is the holy Lamb of God who went out to the wilderness and defeated Satan’s temptations. He is the holy Lamb of God who three years later climbed another little mountain just outside Jerusalem’s walls, a hill called Calvary. And there the Son and Lamb of God was sacrificed for our sins. There the Lord did not hold back death from his Son, his only Son, Jesus, whom he loves. On that mountain the Son of God and Lamb of God was sacrificed for our sins. The holy life of the Lamb became ours, and the sin of the world died with him.

God wants you to know this is true, and to know it for certain. His Holy Spirit inspired St. Paul to assure you that the sacrifice of God’s Son and Lamb is for you: **Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all.** “Us all” is the human race. The sacrifice that makes you holy and slays all sin is yours. This God tells you this not only with words, but with a resurrection from the dead: **Christ Jesus, who died, and more than that, was raised to life...**The Lamb of God was sacrificed for you, but he did not stay dead. No, a dead Jesus is no good at all. A Jesus who stays dead is devastating doubt, but a risen, living Jesus is confidence: he is Lamb and Son of God, and his sacrifice secures your eternal salvation. In him you are righteous, sins forgiven.

There is no other love quite like this: divine love that allows the sword to fall on his Son, his only Son, whom he loves, Jesus Christ – for you. It is love so powerful that it brings you to God’s side as his own dear child. And it is love so powerful that nothing is able to separate you from him.

No doubt, many things will try to separate you from God’s side. There is the thought that I need more to make it through this life than just the forgiveness of my sins. I need to pay my rent, too. I need a vacation, too, preferably before I keel over. I have family that look to me to provide for them. I need peace and quiet. I need support from other people. Sometimes I do not see how God will possibly give me all these things. But these concerns cannot separate us from God’s love. Not when we listen to the most splendid line of greater-to-lesser reasoning ever expressed: **Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also graciously give us things along with him?** God gave his Son to be the Lamb of sacrifice for your Son. You know that. He has promised it and proved it. In that knowledge, no worry about anything you need in this world will separate you from him.

Neither will anybody. **What then will we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?** Many in our world are against the message of God’s love, and wish to erase it, along with all faith in that love. Many wish to make us feel like fools who believe in fairy tales, and shame us into unbelief. Many would like to move in violence against the gospel, and in many places are. But so what? God is for us. His Son has made us his children. So what happens, even the worst happens? What happens when a fellow Christian even has to pay the ultimate sacrifice for their faith? They win! They get to be with God forever. What happens when you suffer an insult for Christ? You win! God will reward you in his kingdom. In the love of Christ, bad is made good and the worst that can happen is the best that can happen. When you know that – and you do – no opposition will separate you from God’s love.

But what about all the other dangers of this life? Couldn’t they be powerful enough to pry us from God’s side? **What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 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. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.** What’s the best conquering you’ve ever done? Ever win a spelling bee? How about employee of the month? Think bigger: ever helped win a war? Conquered labor and delivered a beautiful little brand-new baby? Conquered conflict and held a family together? In Christ, you conquer what no one else can: sin and death and Satan’s power. He makes you a conqueror on plain unimaginable to any mind but God’s. And God has made you that kind conqueror in his Son and Lamb. You have sin and death beaten in Christ.

But, there’s guilt, too. And it could be argued that guilt – left unchecked – is more powerful than everything else we’ve considered. Recently I stumbled on a BBC show – actually a Scottish show – called “Guilt.” I’m not endorsing everything in the show, especially all the potty-mouth and sexual immorality. But I stuck with the show and appreciated it through all that because I don’t think the program’s purpose was the glorify any of it. Instead, it was to show the driving power of guilt, how it lingers and manipulates people’s thoughts and actions for years, decades, after they’ve done their dirt. And finally, it destroys. The message of the show was that there are ways to overcome guilt: time, family, and redemptive work. If you use those, you can overcome, or at least manage guilt and it will not destroy those around you. If not, it will and in spectacular fashion. Time, family, and good outward works can work to tamp down feelings of guilt, and make it less outwardly destructive. But none of those things forgive – remove – the dirt that causes the guilt.

The true cure for guilt is the annihilation of the sin that causes it. **Who will bring an accusation against God's elect?** Did you know that name Satan means "Accuser"? Satan uses guilt against God's people. There are even several pictures in Scripture of Satan accusing the saints in God's courtroom. And it's interesting: God's response is never, "No, Satan, you're wrong! He's a good person who did more good than bad in his life." Instead, God tells Satan to shut his mouth, and then does something to remove the sin and its guilt. He drapes a robe of righteousness over the accused, or makes a declaration of innocence. That is justification: **God is the one who justifies!** The Son of God and Lamb of God lived righteousness that is ours through faith in him. The Son and Lamb of God died to remove the guilt of sin, and so the father justifies us – he declares us not guilty in his courtroom.

So can the guilt of your sin separate you from God? In Christ, never. **Who is the one who condemns?** Please understand, the next words you will hear are "Christ Jesus." But that's not the answer to the question. For the Christian, the answer to, **Who is the one who condemns?** Is "No one!" And here's why: **Christ Jesus, who died, and more than that, was raised to life, is the one who is at God's right hand and who is also interceding for us!** Jesus has worked as God's Son and Lamb to pay the price for all our sin, so that we will not be condemned for it. Instead, in Jesus, God justifies us. He calls us holy. And Paul adds another comfort. Jesus lives – not only to prove our sins are paid for – but to plead for us in heaven, between us and the Father, for the forgiveness he earned. There is no other answer the Father can give but forgiveness and salvation to the Lamb and Son who sits at his right hand. So here is what you can do with your guilt. Tell it to take a walk. "The sin that produced you is gone, guilt. And Jesus still pleads for me, so that sin is never coming back. So get away from me." And if you're guilt is the clingy type that keeps coming back, you can keep telling it the same thing over and over.

The needs of life, opposition to our faith, all the dangers of this world, the guilt of wrong we have done or right we have left undone – none of it can separate from the love of God in Christ. Say it in your heart, together with St. Paul, because of what the Lamb has done for you. Say it with all your heart, until you reach your heavenly home: **For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powerful forces, neither 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.** Amen.