

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

26th July 2020 – Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 8:31-39

GOD IS FOR US

‘If God is for us, who can be against us?’ Romans 8:31, from the opening verse of our reading for today. Just have a look at it. Have a think about it. What does it mean to you? How does it make you feel? This is one of the main Bible readings a pastor has in the tool kit for visiting people, especially when they are sick, in hospital, grieving, or going through any hard times. I would say that easily these words here from Paul along with Psalm 23 are the two readings I have used most over the years when visiting people, because they are words of comfort, peace, and knowing we can rely on God in all things. For the same reason, this reading also stands alongside Psalm 23 also as being regularly used at funerals, another time when people need comfort and the reminder of God’s love. ‘If God is for us, who can be against us?’: what stronger and more emphatic statement can we have that God is with us in anything we go through.

Throughout the past, how ever many it is, years of my life, I have always been thankful that I live in the time and the place which I do. You read and hear stories of things which happened at times in our nation’s past, and sadly still happen in some parts of the world today, and you may well think to yourself, ‘thank God I will never have to know what it is like to go through that’. Do you ever think like that? The things we just take for granted, like: being able to go to the shops at any time and know that we can buy the basic things we need, like toilet paper. Knowing that we can drive and see family and friends when and where we want. The freedom we have to be able to cross borders at any time, totally unimpeded. That most people own businesses or have jobs which are safe and secure because we have a strong and robust economy which can withstand anything which comes against it. How fortunate we are that we can freely travel whenever we want, both within our own country and overseas. That we can freely worship with other Christians in our churches each week. That things like going out for dinner, going to the movies, watching sporting events either live or on TV, or whatever recreation we want to have, these will always be available to us. That we can freely visit

loved ones in hospital or aged care facilities. I have always thought, ‘how blessed I am to live in a time when these things will always be a part of my life’.

Now let’s pull out the elephant in the room, who’s not hiding very well, and whose name is, Corona (tipped to be a very popular baby name this year). Up until five short months ago, for my whole life I had thought all of those things I mentioned, and more, would always be a part of what I experience in my life. The reality though is, of course, that right now we are going through and facing things which we never thought we would.

At the beginning of our lockdown time, back in late March and through April, I kept having the saying go through my head, ‘The wisdom of humans is but foolishness to God’. I can’t find that exact quote in the Bible, but the first two chapters of Ecclesiastes certainly contain that thought. I also thought of the story of the Tower of Babel right back at the beginning of Genesis, when people thought they were so clever that they could even build a tower right up to heaven, only to have God scatter them over the earth.

Now, I am not saying that God has caused this pandemic, and I want to say that really strongly. Like any disaster or suffering that happens in our world today this pandemic is not caused directly by God, or sent by God to punish us. Rather, as with all events like this, it is a result either directly or indirectly of our sin and the fallen nature of our world. Let’s not be like the so called ‘friends’ of Job and say, ‘Wow, you must have been really bad for God to punish you like this!’ God grieves and sorrows both for and with us over the suffering we go through, and the words Paul uses in this reading to describe all God has gone through for us reminds us of this.

But, without doubt, God can and does work through both this pandemic and other sufferings which happen to us, to strengthen us, perhaps correct us, even to bring us closer to Him. If you like, no parent will deliberately cause something bad to happen to their child which will hurt them or make them suffer, but they will help their child to see what can be learnt from what they go through, and from this to be stronger and more capable going forward.

What we have experienced so far this year, and sadly it is not over yet, is that probably for each one of us in some way the relationships, the people, the organisations, the activities, the material

things, in which we had perhaps been putting to some degree our hope, our happiness and our security in, we have now been reminded just how earthly and fleeting these things actually are. In most cases there is nothing wrong with these things in and of themselves; they are there for us to appreciate and enjoy, in fact they are gifts from God. It's just that we have the tendency to sometimes make them more than they are meant to be by placing our hope, our trust, our meaning and purpose, into and around them, instead of in God.

This reading from Romans is so well used and often well known because it brings so much comfort. And it brings comfort because it makes the argument so strongly and plainly that the hope and strength we have in our lives is based in no way at all on what we have done or will do, but solely on what God has done for us in Jesus. Have a look at it again (*Romans 8:31-39*). Is there anything in there which pops up repeatedly here? Paul rests his argument that we know God is for us, on what God has done for us in Jesus. 'He did not keep back His own Son'. 'Christ died and was raised to life'. 'Can anything separate us from the love of Christ?'. 'We have won more than a victory through Christ who loves us'. We can be sure of God's love for us, because of the real, historical and human act of Jesus dying for us.

And yes, those of you have looked at this will have noticed the one right at the end, the clincher of the argument: 'Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!' (39) Based on all that he has written, and being so certain of the love God shows for us in Jesus, Paul can make this strong statement that nothing can separate us from God's love. God's forgiveness, God's care, God's strength, God's help, God's guidance, all these things are there for us whatever we go through, no matter what we have done.

Both the words of this reading and what I have said here today are not meant to downplay or lessen any suffering or hardship you or anyone else have gone through or are going through. Sadly, these things are sometimes a part of the lives we now lead. In listing the things we may face here Paul doesn't say God will just take them away from us. In fact, he even bluntly writes: 'For you we face death all day long' (36).

What is here the strong reminder that God is for us, and we can be sure of that because of everything He has done for us in Jesus. He is always for us, always has been, always will be. In that fact we can put our hope and strength.

As people we are learning some valuable things at this time; lessons we want to keep. As people we will probably forget these lessons very quickly when things get back to 'normal' whatever that is and whenever that may be (I'm not even going there!). Something we have probably learnt, and something we certainly hope we always remember, is the great love of God is always with us and we can always rely on that. Pray that we each remember God's love. Pray that we remember that in Jesus God has shown us that nothing can separate us from His love. Pray we always remember that, in all things, whatever we go through, God is for us. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION/ REFLECTION

God is always with us?

- Have there ever being any times in your life, any situations you have been through, when you have struggled to know or feel that God is with you in that situation?
- If so, how did you come to experience and know His love in your life again?
- How can we each use the promise in this reading to give hope to Christians who may be struggling with things which are happening in their lives, or to help lead those who don't know God's love to come to know that He is for them also?

There Is No Condemnation

³³ If God says his chosen ones are acceptable to him, can anyone bring charges against them? ³⁴ Or can anyone condemn them? No indeed! Christ died and was raised to life, and now he is at God's right side, speaking to him for us. (Romans 8:33-34)

Because Jesus died and rose again for us, not only have we been declared not guilty, we are not guilty; no one can accuse us.

- How does it make you feel to know that before God you are now totally innocent, so that there is nothing to come between you and your relationship with Him?
- Does this mean that it is ok for us to now go and do whatever we want, because we are forgiven anyway? If not, how should we be trying to live?

We Are More Than Conquerors

The words in this reading are more than a statement of what has happened, they are description of how we are today; more than conquerors.

- Read through the reading again, several times if you wish. What is it saying you each time you read it?
- Note the promises of what God has done for you in Jesus: He is really is for us.
- Pray for any times of situations when you struggle to remember or accept His love. Pray also that your words and actions may bear witness to God's unending love to others also.

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