

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
July 30, 2017

Text: Romans 8:28-38

Theme: “Who?” A Confident Cry!

“Who?” can be a very important question. The answer certainly has a relationship to getting things done. “Who will prepare the meal tonight?” “Who will pick up the visitors at the airport?” “Who will do the best job in advancing the plan?” The “who” could also be a problem. “Who will try to steal from me?” “Who will throw a monkey wrench in the gears?” “Who will not do what she promised she would do?”

“Who” is a big question in our text for today. Paul asks it rhetorically. There are some bad news whos and some good news whos. We may also see some “whats” in here, but really it gets back to the Who. There may be many whos or whats against us, but the Ultimate Who changes everything right now and forever.

We can start out today by being “WhoMes,” that is we can ask, “Who, me?” Are these wonderful words directed to me? Are we among those who are objects of God’s unstoppable love? Well we should be surprised knowing our own history and our constant shortcomings. Can the love of God seem far away? In Ephesians 2 we read these words of Paul, “...remember you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” (vs 12) Paul tells the pagan philosophers in Acts 17 that God “is not far from each of us.” However, if left up to us, He would always be beyond our reach.

No, we were separated from the promise, dead in trespasses and sins. We were under the whole load, the self-imposed load. We read in Isaiah 59:1, “Behold, the LORD’s

hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.” The who of you and the who of me were apart from Christ, covered with sin. Apart from God’s law we did not even know how sinful we were. We could not see the totality, maybe not so bad from our point of view, even manageable? Now we remember what Paul writes about the power of sin after conversion, the ongoing struggle. Before faith there was no struggle, enslaved to sin.

But God has done something about that, His plan from the beginning and even before. It is all driven by His love. God does indeed show His love for us for while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). Jesus takes all our sin upon Himself after leading the perfectly sinless life. Who now will bring any charge against God’s elect. It is Christ Jesus who died, more than that, who now is at the right hand of the God interceding for us. “For me?” you ask. Yes, for you, buried with Christ and raised with Him in baptism. He has taken your sin and now you are covered over with His righteousness. Now God see righteousness all over us. From our viewpoint, from the law, we know that we are continually in need of cleansing. No condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

God so love the world that He gave His only Son. God’s lifeline of grace has reached down to us and we hold on through faith. You are God’s child now. But what if, what if it changes? There are many challenges as we all know. We are in this body of flesh and we face the forces of evil under the evil one. We are crutching it along waiting for the return of our Lord and the redemption of our bodies. All creation is groaning with us for this day and the Holy Spirit is groaning for us. There is quite a battle going on and it really is not against flesh and blood.

There can be just waves of trouble out there. The waves of tribulation, distress, persecutions, famine, nakedness, danger, or sword. These are no light matters. Consider tribulation, think of troubling circumstances, trouble that brings pressure. Distress carries the idea of being in a narrow place, a narrow place getting narrower. Then persecution, a pressing against, a reaction against your faith and faithfulness. Then if we add in nakedness, hunger, danger, sword for good measure, or sad measure, it's the menacing seven. Any one is bad enough, but in concert and in combination, woe. Will it somehow stop the love flow? Paul is speaking from experience. He is not just throwing out for instances. We see him speak of most of these in the second letter to the Corinthians (chapters 10 – 12).

But it could be even worse, from experienced to as bad as you could imagine. Paul quotes from Psalm 44, “For Your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep for the slaughter.” This is of God’s people crying out for deliverance in the midst of trouble. Paul assures there is deliverance, actually through all the already mentioned, more than conquerors (vs 37). Then he moves into the new list, the as bad as it could get list. I learned a new term as I looked at the text this time. It seems Paul is employing a figure of speech which we now call merisms. In a merism you use two terms, maybe opposites in a way as end points to refer to not only those end points, but the whole spectrum in between, like this land is your land, “this land is my land, *from California to New York Island.*” He’s still considering the question of who can separate us from the love of Christ. So can death or life (and anything and everything that may be in between), or angels or rulers (probably holy beings and evil being and every and all beings in between), the present or things to come, than he puts a loner in here, powers, then back to the pairs, can height or depth do it (and any elevation in between). Can any of these things do it, and

if there is another who or what besides all these, if something has somehow been excluded, or anything else in all creation? Is there a who or a what that can cut us off? Will the line be severed, or kinked, or pinched? Will the flow be stopped so that we just shrivel on the vine?

The answer of course, is NO!!! The Ultimate Who has it under control, always has, always will. Paul has laid out five actions, actions in which God is the subject. They are all in the past tense, though you would think the last should be in the future. “For those He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son (Paul is looking forward to the return of Christ and the resurrection when our bodies will be made like unto His glorious body)...and those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified (vs 29-30).”

Talk of predestination can be troubling, but spoken to the believer, it's not meant to be, no, just the opposite, assuring. In the NT words of predestination are always addressed to believers. It's a Gospel message. God has got this, God has got you, always has, and always will. No who or what can ever changed that no matter what merism you may use. But, we may ask, why is “glorified” in the past tense, that is yet to happen, is it not? The past can point to the certainty that it is as good as done already for God is the doer. In another sense we share in it already as we have been raised up and reign with Christ even now.

So the answer to who or what can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus is no body and nothing. Again, just look at the picture. Who can accuse, the Son who took the accusations so that the accuser has been thrown down is at the Father's right hand interceding for us. The Spirit is interceding in groans beyond human words. The Triune God for us, how can we doubt it, did not spare His only Son but handed Him over for us

all. He is for us, who can be against us, well, everything and everyone but it doesn't matter. Under God's watch it all has to work for our good. It won't stop the grace flow, may even be used in service of the grace flow to more. How so?

Consider persecution, persecution by Saul in Jerusalem led to the carrying of the Gospel beyond Jerusalem to places such as Antioch. This would be the very church that would one day send the former persecutor out as the apostle. Or think of sword. Herod Agrippa used the sword to take off the head of James, the brother of John. The church prayed in earnest for the release of Peter. Peter would be delivered and the church strengthened to continue its mission. But what about James, his head was separated from his body after all. His was the first apostolic blood to flow in faithfulness to his Lord. The time of his earthly service had come to an end. His time to sing praises before the throne of God and the Lamb had just begun.

Consider danger, sword, and famine together. This led boys from the southern part of Sudan to walk hundreds of miles fleeing for their lives. Many have made their way to the US, Paul Kon included. Now he goes back to help and encourage others, and he's not going alone, the best encouragement of all coming in the Gospel!

Romans 8 may be the most encouraging chapter in all the Bible. It is not meant to direct us to fatalism (what will be will be) or complacency—"Hey, I'm covered so I can just go off and do my own thing whatever that might be." We have been saved forever to be with our Lord in glory and saved for now to walk after our Lord. Our Lord has wonderful work for us to do. Our work is not to gain our salvation. That is gift, only, always, totally. This being the case why do we read in Philippians 2:12, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Maybe this doesn't

sound very assuring, but it is a matter of working your salvation, not working for it, but working out of it as God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared beforehand for us to do. And the fear and trembling—reminds us that it is important and serious, this service to our Lord, and maybe it is tied to the groaning that Paul speaks of as we battle temptation here below, groan as we remember we need those crutches.

But know this, God is not going to let go of you, never let go of you from His end. He doesn't force us to believe. We could let go on ours. But as we continue in His Word why would we? He pulls us through it all and when it's time will pull us up to be where He is. And then the day to which any present suffering are not worthy to be compared to, the day of our Lord's return in glory.

Who will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus? No one and nothing because of the Who who has us. He even uses the attacks for our eternal good and the spread of the Gospel. All praise, honor, and worship from our lips, our hearts, and our hands to Him now and forever. Amen