

July 30, 2023

Romans 8:26-39, *The Message Bible*

Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. [The Spirit] does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. [The Spirit] knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God.

That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good. God knew what she was doing from the very beginning. She decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love her along the same lines as the life of her Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity she restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him. After God made that decision of what her children should be like, she followed it up by calling people by name. After God called them by name, she set them on a solid basis with herself. And then, after getting them established, she stayed with them to the end, gloriously completing what she had begun.

So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose? If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing herself to the worst by sending her own Son, is there anything else she wouldn't gladly and freely do for us? And who would dare tangle with God by messing with one of God's chosen? Who would dare even to point a finger? The One who died for us - who was raised to life for us! - is in the presence of God at this very moment sticking up for us. Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying

threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture:

They kill us in cold blood because they hate you.

We're sitting ducks; they pick us off one by one.

None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I'm absolutely convinced that nothing - nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable - absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.

Romans 8:35,37-39, New Revised Standard Version

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

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

I use the ending verses of this passage at almost all my funeral services – “Nothing can separate us from” love shared.

This is the foundation for my belief in life after death. Relational love that builds up the other never dies. It remains a part of us; a part that lives, as we pass it on.

I might be taking these verses out of context, as Paul is writing about more than an “end-of-life” scenario. He is

writing to a church that is growing weary of waiting – waiting for justice, waiting for the kingdom, waiting for Jesus. They are losing confidence in the gospel message.

Just before the beginning of today's passage Paul writes "hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

The church in Rome seems to be at a loss for what to do. They don't even know how or what to pray for. In the face of this dilemma Paul tells them not to over-think their situation. Their sighs of distress are enough. The Spirit knows them better than they know themselves. The Spirit, God, is with them, praying with and for them.

As Paul continues, he seems to imply that the Roman Christians are beginning to wonder if what they do, based on Jesus' teachings, is at all meaningful. This is where Paul builds his argument around love – both God's love, revealed by and in Jesus, and the love they are trying to imitate. This love, Paul argues, is how God works good in the world, in and through them.

And then, in Eugene Peterson's *The Message* translation, Paul drops what for me is a bombshell. The twenty-ninth verse in the NRSV reads, "those whom [God] foreknew [God] also predestined to be conformed to the image of [the] Son". Peterson translates this as, "We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him."

This excites me, because Paul is telling us we are to live and love like Jesus; we are to have the faith of Jesus. We are not expected to "believe *in* Jesus", rather to have the "faith *of* Jesus". Our job is to faithfully imitate Jesus to the best of our ability.

Will we fall short? Of course, we will, and do! But we must not be discouraged. If what we do is done in love, then, Paul tells us, God can work that for the good.

And, when we act out of love, nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from God or one another. Not even death.

So, try to always keep in mind that Jesus is "the original and intended shape of our lives." Jesus is how God intends for us to live. And, as hard as that is to do, do not be discouraged, for God will never abandon us. Amen.