



No Separation – Touchpoint for July 26, 2023

Romans 8:26-39 (NRSVUE) Present Suffering and Future Glory

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words. And God, who searches hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son but gave him up for all of us, how will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ who died, or rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than victorious through him 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.

Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.

"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."

It is a passage that is often read at funerals. And rightly so. For it speaks and gives comfort to those who have lost a loved one by reminding them that their loved one is not lost to God. Death cannot separate us from God.

But I wonder, why do we wait for funerals to read this? Can't this passage give comfort in life? Doesn't this passage give comfort for life?

I know I had you sit quietly when I read this passage before this reflection, but I want you to hear it again. I want you to close your eyes, feet on the floor, arms uncrossed... fold or unfold your hands.

And I want to read this to you in a few different ways, with some silence between, again. I will tell you when to open your eyes back up. So close your eyes and get comfortable. AND LISTEN.

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....

Nothing in all of creation can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.....

Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.....

Nothing can separate you.....

Nothing.....

OK. Open your eyes.

I don't really know if there is that much more to say. I should probably just leave it at that and sit down. You don't get much more gospel than this. You don't get much more grace than this.

But like the lawyer who sought to justify himself to Jesus and couldn't keep his mouth shut, I will continue merrily on my way.

Why do we wait to speak these words over someone only after they have died?

Don't you think they might have an impact on someone while they are alive?

How much time have we spent in our lives trying to get in good with God? How much time have we spent worrying about our sin separating us from God?

Don't you think these words might have an impact on all of that?

If you have ever spent time worrying about your sin separating you from God, then hear this line again,

"Nothing in all of creation can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus."

**And guess what, that includes you... because you are a part of creation.
So not even you can separate yourself from the love of God in Christ Jesus.**

But we keep worrying about it. I cannot tell you the number of times I have heard people talk about the guilt they feel, or whether they have done enough in God's eyes.

And I always ask them, "What is bigger... What is greater... your sin or God's grace?"

"Which is bigger, your sin or God's grace?"

And I have yet to hear anyone respond with "My sin." Everyone says, "God's grace."

So what is it again you are worried about?

I don't understand why this passage or these words aren't written on billboards instead of what we normally see from Christian groups. Why does it always seem that, "The wages of sin is death," is the most popular billboard... which, by the way is only half the sentence.

I remember when I lived in San Diego, there was a group, who I can only assume considered themselves Christian, who would put up billboards in the two months leading up to Christmas.

It would usually start with "Jesus is the reason for the season." Which isn't a bad reminder. But then it would move to "The wages of sin is death," which I found quite predictable. And then the final one, which I can only assume they thought was funny, read, "Don't make me have to come down there... Signed, God."

Really, "Don't make me have to come down there." Before Christmas!?!

Don't they read the Bible???

You don't have to read more than three chapters into Genesis to find out God comes down to earth, not because God has to, but because God wants to. God wants to walk in the gardens of our lives with us.

You don't have to read more than one chapter into the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John to find out God comes down to earth, not because God has to, but because God LOVES to. God desires to be one with us.

And by the second chapter of Acts you will get the same message through the story of Pentecost. God pours out the Spirit on us here, down on this earth.

And in case you forget about that by the time you get to Revelation... In the next to the **last chapter** of the Bible, John has a vision of the New Jerusalem, the Holy City, coming down out of heaven to set up on earth.

And these great words are spoken:

"See, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell among them and they will be God's people and God will be with them."

"Don't make me have to come down there..." Signed, God." It would be laughable if it weren't so sad.

Look, all I'm asking for is that Christians who put up billboards at least read the Bible before putting them up. Is that too much to ask?

And here is why God is so willing to come down here. Because God wants nothing to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. NOTHING!!!!

And to get that through our thick skulls God simply chooses to spend every moment of creation here with us. In body and in Spirit... So that we will know that nothing in all of creation, and even beyond creation, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Look... let's be real clear. The reason that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus isn't because of our commitment to God, or our desire to go and be wherever God is. Not in any way shape or form. And no reading of the Bible could give you that idea.

No, the reason nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus is because of God's commitment to us. And not even our hanging him on a cross can stop it.

And "no" I'm not making this up, nor is it wishful thinking. It's right there, in the book. READ IT!!! Seriously...read it.

It's called grace.

Yet I can hear it now, “But, but, but... We have to do something don't we.”

Well... to steal a line from a pastor that my boss Eric said he heard. 'No we don't have to do anything... Grace doesn't have a big butt.”

Actually, grace doesn't even have a small but...Grace has no but.

And yet it continues...

I can't tell you the number of times I have people who want to add their 'buts' to the conversation.

“But what if you reject him, don't accept him. That certainly separates you.”

And my reply is, “You mean what if I didn't acknowledge he existed, or I knew him. Like what if I denied him as being a part of my life?”

And they answer, “Yes”.

And then I add, “You mean and what if I turned against him, you know, betrayed his will and his ways? You mean like that?”

And they answer, “Yes.”

And then I add even more, “You mean what if I ran away from him, deserted him. Tried to escape from his presence. You mean like that?...

You're telling me if I am a denier of him, a betrayer of him, and one who runs from him, I will separate myself from him?”

And the usual answer I hear is, “Yes. You will.”

And my reply is...

“Well, God's got a meal that begs to differ with you.” And it was first given to a denier, a betrayer and those who ran away from him.

SOOOOO.....

“... 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.”

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Spirit of the Living God

(Celtic Spirits)

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Break me, melt me, mold me, fill me.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come, Bring Your Burdens to God (Woza Nomthwalo Wakho)

(John L. Bell, The Wild Goose Collection)

Swahili:

Woza nomthwalo wakho,

Woza nomthwalo wakho,

Woza nomthwalo wakho,

Uyes' akasozathi hayi.

Come, bring your burdens to God,

Come, bring your burdens to God,

Come, bring your burdens to God,

For Jesus will never say no.

The Meal

Our Father (The Lord's Prayer)

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Benediction

Christ Before Me

(Keith Duke)

Christ before me. Christ behind me.

Christ above me. Christ below me.

Christ to left and Christ to right.

Christ within both day and night.