

Sermon Romans 8 28 39 7th Sunday after Pentecost Series A

Sermon: 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Romans 8:28-39 (vv. 28, 31, 37)

Theme: All things work for the good of the Christians

Goal: That the Holy Spirit may strengthen our faith for times of trials

Dear Friends,

Introduction: *The news brings us the disturbing scenes of Christians being exiled from Mosul. Paul speaks of God's love for people going through seriously difficult times, but he assures us that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Change comes. The people of Mosul have included Christians for nearly 1800 years, and this is the first Sunday in millennia in which there is not a Christian worship service in that city.* ([PBrandt@cu-portland.edu](mailto:PBrandt@cu-portland.edu))

What shall we say? Has God abandoned them? Are they not loved by God anymore? They have survived in a Muslim country for such a long time; and now, all of a sudden, they cannot worship in their churches anymore and have to flee due to the threat of fanatic Muslims (ISIS) who gave them only three options: either convert to Islamism, or die, or pay a high tax to have the right to survive.

This news seems to be very far from our reality. But the trials those Christians are facing are to be compared with any other trials we also face: sickness, depression, unemployment, an accident, and problems in our lives... Does God forsake His children when someone bad happens? What does it mean that "all things work for the good of those who love God"? *This is hard to preach to people who are in the middle of suffering. Often they can see little beyond their suffering.* ([PBrandt@cu-portland.edu](mailto:PBrandt@cu-portland.edu)). Does "all things" mean good and bad things as well? Paul comes to a climax in this text when he speaks about suffering in this chapter 8 of Romans. And he assures us "that

in all things **God** works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”.

I – God is for us

First of all Paul assures us that we are God’s chosen people and that He is for us against all kind of trials and enemies. Paul uses a sequence of steps to assure us why God is for us. Note that God is not just “with” us, but He is also “for” us against our enemies.

A) God has foreknown us from eternity. We had been in His gracious plans much before we were born. This gives us confidence that we are not just a number in the world or in the church statistics, but we are beloved people of God.

B) “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.” The final goal of God’s choice is that He wants us to be like His resurrected Son Jesus, who is living now with Him in heaven. - I cannot understand this predestination of God. But I believe it. *I myself will stick with what God has told me. God is for US!* ([PBrandt@cu-portland.edu](mailto:PBrandt@cu-portland.edu))

C) “And those he predestined, he also called.” We confess with Luther in the Third Article of the Creed: *“I believe that ...the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”* We were called by God and we follow His voice, the voice of our Good Shepherd!

D) And “those he called, he also justified”. We are not guilty anymore, but we were justified by the blood of Jesus poured out on the cross. *When God made us believers, he forgave all our sins and made us innocent* (Series A, p. 178).

E) “Those he justified, he also glorified.”The goal of God’s work for us is our glorification in heaven, like Jesus was glorified after His death and resurrection. *We do not enjoy it yet, but we have it!* (Series A, p. 178).

“What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who

can be against us?” Therefore we can be sure “that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”, even when bad things happen.

Paul goes now to another two sequences of steps: One happens in the heavenly realm, that we cannot see; and the other one happens in our reality, that we can experience.

II – No charge and condemnation anymore

A) “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?”

We know by experience how much our conscience accuses us when we do something wrong: *‘Why did you do this again? Do you think God will forgive you again and again?’* Or when something bad happens to us or to someone closely related to us, someone whispers in our ears: *‘Do you think God loves you? If God loves you, He wouldn’t allow this happen...’* – On the other hand, the devil accuses us before God, like he did with the patriarch Job, trying to condemn us. (Revelation 12:10) – What is God’s answer? “It is God who justifies!” A court of law is in mind. *No charge can be brought against a Christian because God has already pronounced a verdict of NOT GUILTY.* (CSSB p. 1729). And He is the Supreme Court! No other appeal can be done!

B) “Who is he that condemns?” The devil always tries to push us to condemnation again. He puts lots of temptations in our way, lots of other options that we shall follow rather than the way of God. Is there any danger for the Christians? Of course there is. But Paul points in this text to the source of our strength and victory: “Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” If the devil wants to condemn us, we have a strong and faithful Attorney: Jesus Christ, who defends us and intercedes for us. We shall not be desperate when we feel accused, but we have to run to our Attorney and appeal to Him. He will help us.

III – Nothing can separate us from the love of God

Now, the third sequences of steps have to do with our personal experiences: “What shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” Paul had passed through all these sufferings, and eventually he was put to death by sword in Rome. Even suffering everything, even the death of martyr of the Christian faith, Paul’s answer to these questions is: “No, in all things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither present nor the future, nor any power, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!” – I don’t need to highlight the different steps in contrast. They are clear by themselves. Neither good nor bad things can separate us from the love of God.

*Conclusion: Our present life is characterized by suffering, but we are sustained by the hope of our ultimate good, our glorification. More than that, we can take comfort in the promise that what is happening to us is controlled and directed by God for our good. We will not always understand or enjoy the things we experience, but we can rest in the assurance that we will not experience anything that God does not allow and uses for our present and future good. Our sufferings, our groaning, our hope and our joy – all are designated for our ultimate good. God is in control and nothing is beyond His power... We live in a world of uncertainty and we suffer frustrations, tragedies and despair... God has provided for our victory. We can rest assured that His love will never let us down. All we need to do is trust God and be convinced that He can keep His promises no matter how unlikely that may sometimes appear in our circumstances. (ABC 1364).*

Amen