

Separations. Do you remember the day you had to take your pet down to the vet's office for the last time? 2 ½ years ago, I took my dog Brodie for his last morning walk. I brought him back to the house and petted him tenderly. I put his steps out and helped him up them into the backseat of my car. Then I took him to the vet. In the patient room, he tried to use his nose to open the door. He was an expert at opening doors. I calmed him down. The vet and her assistant came in and gave him a relaxing drug. Brodie crumbled to the floor. They then gave him another injection that stopped his heart. The dog that I had walked with for 11 years every morning who always loved me and wanted to be with me was gone. I was devastated. But it is even more difficult to watch a human being, a family member die. You know that the days of companionship and communication are over. Furthermore, There is a terrible knot in the stomach when you need to say goodbye to a son or daughter and see them leave for school or the military. Or what about the home that you lived in for many years? It was not easy to walk out the door and move.

In the Revelation, John saw heaven as a place where there will be "no more sea." He was an exile on the island of Patmos. The waves of the Mediterranean Sea separated him from the congregation he loved, the dear Christians in Ephesus. It is also hard for us as a congregation to say goodbye to people and see them move to other parts of the country. It seems that at Open Bible, our members stay around 10 years, then they either sell their house and move back to the Midwest, die and go to heaven, or just stay in the home they have up north, full time.

The love Jesus has for you never changes. He is always the same, yesterday, today and forever. Some of the most comforting words in Scripture are found in the words of our lesson. Life may have its share of changes, ups and downs, and twists and turns. People leave us and blessings are taken away. The love of Jesus is always the same. We are: Forever Loved By God

Life has its gains and life has its losses. Are there any losses we experience that could possibly in any way separate us from Christ's love? You suffer the loss of good health. You suffer the loss of all your money in a stock market crash. You lose your children in death. You lose a close connection with your grandchildren. What does Paul say? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all- how will he not with him, graciously give us all things."

Paul says, God is for you. Not maybe, not has been, or would be, but God is! He is for you today. At this hour. At this minute. No need to wait in line or come back tomorrow. He is with you. He could not be closer to you than he is at this second. Let me prove that to you says Paul.

Suppose a man comes upon a child being beaten by thugs. He dashes into the mob, rescues the boy, and carries him to the hospital. The youngster is nursed to health. The man pays for the child's treatment. He learns that the child is an orphan and adopts him as his own and gives the boy his name. And then, one night, months later, the father hears the son sobbing into his pillow. He goes to him and asks about the tears. "I'm worried Daddy. I'm worried about tomorrow. Where will I get food to eat? How am I going to buy clothes to stay warm? And where will I sleep?"

The father is rightfully troubled. Haven't I shown you? Don't you understand? I risked my life to save you. I gave my money to treat you. You wear my name. I've called you my son. Would I do all that and then not meet your needs?" This is Paul's question. Would he who gave his son to die on Calvary's cross for us not meet our needs?

Honestly, now. Did God save you so you would fret? Would he teach you to walk just to watch you fall? Would he be nailed to the cross for your sins and then disregard your prayers?

Come on. Is the Scripture teasing us when it says, "He will give his angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways. I don't think so either. Losses will not separate you from God's Love. God gave up his son for us, surely He is for us. We are forever in His love.

2) Shall judgment? Could it be that condemnation or judgment could separate you from God's love? Not when you have Christ as your Savior. "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ who died, more than that, who was raised to life-is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." Can you think of anyone who might possibly drag up something from your past that might threaten you and tell you that you are not worthy of God's love? I can! I have a list of things from my past, that the devil still tries to parade in front of me. How about you? Any skeletons in your closet? In Revelation Satan is described as an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his head. Then it says of him, "He accuses them before our God day and night." Just as Satan attacked Jesus in the desert for forty days and nights, he viciously attacks the people Jesus loves. He wants you to feel shame about how you acted in the past, so that it becomes so large that you think, "No one could ever forgive a worm like me."

Some day every human being will stand before God in the final judgment. We will have to give an answer for every single sinful act, every sinful thought and every failure to do good things. How clear are the words of Scripture: "We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." Also: "It is appointed unto man once to day and then comes the judgment." Satan is a master at creating doubt, even leading us to think we must contribute something to the process of making ourselves worthy.

The question is raised, "Who will bring anything against those who God has chosen?" The answer comes next. "It is God who justifies." Wow! Just think of what this is saying to us this morning. No one can bring charges against you because God himself has justified you, declared you not guilty. Think back to how upset we were about 26

years ago when the court declared OJ Simpson not guilty for reasonable doubt. Because the court declared him not guilty, he could not be tried again for that crime. The Lord your God was able to get you off the hook and get you a verdict of not guilty. He did not use reasonable doubt or twisting of the evidence. He paid the debt in your place, for you, by placing the guilt and the punishment you deserve on his Son. "The punishment for our guilt was upon him." The Father raised Jesus from the dead and with that he pronounced us "Not guilty!" That's the final word. To that we can say a loud "Amen."

And if there is any further doubt that someone can bring a charge against you, listen again to what Paul says about Jesus. "Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-more than that, who was raised to life- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for you." Need a good lawyer to represent you before God. You have the best. Jesus is sitting on the right hand of God the Father. He is pleading your case. He is interceding for you. Joyfully we can look forward to being judged by our God in this life and on the judgment day because we can say with Paul in Romans 8:1, "There is now therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ."

3) Shall persecution? What about persecution? Will persecution separate you from the love of Christ? "Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or sword? As it is written for your sake we face death all day long: we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." Some of the Christians in Rome who read this letter faced severe persecution for their faith. Some were wrapped in sheepskins and placed into the Coliseum and torn apart by wild beasts. Christians facing severe persecution have lived from day to day sustained by the courage that comes from knowing no pit is so deep that Christ and his love are not always

deeper.

During the time of the Spanish Inquisition they found the skeletal remains of Christian Huguenot chained to the wall of a deep dungeon. Scratched on the wall with a sharp nail or stone was a cross. On each side of the cross were the Spanish words “la anchura, la longitud, la profundidad y la altura.” Translated they mean “How wide and long and high and deep” referring to the love of Christ. As we sing in “A Mighty Fortress is our God, “And do what they will -- Hate, steal, hurt, or kill -- Though all may be gone, Our victory is won; The kingdom’s ours forever!” Paul says in all these things we are more than conquerors thru him who loved us.

How much do you trust Super-glue? The makers of Super-glue used to have a commercial that showed a man wearing a construction helmet, and that helmet was glued with Super-glue to some sort of a board. That man was supposedly hanging from a very high place, and the only thing holding him to that board was Super-glue. Super-glue is a bond that will never fail – that was the message. Would you be willing to dangle 300 feet in the air, with nothing to keep you from falling except a spoonful of Super-glue on the top of your helmet? How much would you trust it? What if it would start to rain or to snow? What if it became really windy? What if it became extremely hot, 110 degrees? Would you have any doubts?

It says here that “nothing can separate you from the love of God.” Nothing. You are super-glued to the love of God. And that glue is Jesus Christ. He is what has bonded you to the love of God. And it is a bond that cannot be broken by anything. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the loss of a job, nor a terminal illness, nor the loss of a loved one, nor anything else in all creation – nothing can separate you from the love of God. You do not need to doubt. And the key to being doubt-free is remembering that Jesus Christ has bonded you to God’s love through his death and resurrection, and that is a bond that will never fail.

This Lent, let Christ sweep away those doubts that are in your heart. Watch him as he suffers for you. Watch him as he dies for you. Watch him as he rises from the dead. He has made everything right between you and God. Right now, he is at the right hand of the Father, interceding for you. He is the key to having doubt-free Christianity. This Lent, focus on him, and not yourself. Focus on his strength, and you will get stronger. Focus on his deeds, and yours will increase. Focus on his love, and you will become more loving. And through this process, your doubts will disappear. There is nothing the Lord and I can’t handle together. God is indeed for Us!