

Sermon Draft

Text: Romans 8:28–39

Sermon: We're Not Alone

As we continue our walk through Pentecost, in our *Epistle* we continue our walk through Romans as well. Contextually, Paul is expounding on the tension between the present freedom to be found in the Gospel and the reality of the broken and fallen world in which we live. The *Gospel* lessons continue to focus on the teachings of Jesus as found in Matthew, but with a particular emphasis in these several weeks on the parables concerning the Kingdom—this week the parables of the treasure, the pearl, and the dragnet. We learned we are adopted, children of God through our Baptism.

Last week, we looked at how our world is fundamentally broken by sin, destruction, and death. In spite of that, though, there is something inside us that knows the world isn't supposed to be this way and longs for a world where things are the way they were made to be. We learned that we're not home yet.

We know that day is coming, but the waiting can be hard, even when life is going well. And then we all hit times when life doesn't go as planned. Whether it's the cup of coffee that spills while you're rushing out the door . . . or the argument that got out of hand . . . or the doctor who says the words you don't want to hear . . . we all suffer, we all struggle. And when we suffer, it's so easy to draw inward, to turn away from folks around us. We share in the laughter, but so often when we cry, we cry alone. It's a feeling of isolation, a feeling we've all felt at one time or another.

Often when people are struggling they pull away, especially from those who we are closest too. We may not want to burden others, or we want to carry our own weight, so we end up suffering in silence. But those around us, those we are close to know, of course. When we're suffering, the people around us often really don't know what to say, so they often just avoid talking to us or avoid the topic.

We don't do well with acknowledging suffering in our culture, so often that awkwardness takes the form of ignoring the situation and pretending that there's nothing going on, which doesn't actually change anything. It definitely doesn't help the situation. Sadly, over the years I have noticed the idea of suffering alone is more prominent in the church family. I can't recall how many times I have heard about situations after the fact.

When we keep things to ourselves we begin to feel separated from friends and family. But that's nothing compared to how isolated we can feel from God. After the death of his wife, C. S. Lewis wrote in *A Grief Observed* that it is as if God was so very present in the good times, but so absent in the bad. And there's truth there. Sometimes when we're hurting, we cry out to heaven and it seems as if there's no one home. And so we pull back. We begin to wonder if God is listening. Why doesn't he fix all these things? Does he not hear us? Does he not care for us? We can end up feeling as if God has abandoned us, as if we're alone, completely cut off from him.

It's in those sorts of moments that we come to our text this morning. ²⁸ ***We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*** ²⁹***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 among many brothers. If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor 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.

God knows we suffer, but when we suffer, we can know that God has a way of working all things for the good. That doesn't, of course, make them good. Great and terrible evil still happens in our world, and we don't want to confuse them with God's continuing renewal of his creation. But in the midst of darkness, light has dawned. In the midst of suffering, God works good. Indeed, in all these things we are conquerors . . . more than conquerors.

Let's do be clear: this isn't some victory in which we overcome suffering and it all stops. Scripture and history testify there will always be hardship and suffering in this life. We will face sickness, despair, and even, in the end, death. But in the end, we know the last word hasn't yet been spoken.

Sometimes things happen in life, and it's so tempting to think darkness has had the last word. I'll be the first to admit it sometimes seems that way: The door gets slammed. "I'm sorry, we've got to let you go . . ." "The test results aren't good . . ." The casket is lowered into the ground.

There's no hope left. There's nothing left to say, no chance to say it, and we know the happy ending we were hoping for, even praying for, isn't coming. The story is over. Evil has had the last word. Sin has had the last word. Death has had the last word.

Except that it's not over. The last word hasn't been spoken yet, but it belongs to a good and loving God who gave his life to redeem his creation. Good-bye is not the last word.

Unemployment is not the last word. Cancer is not the last word.

Death is not the last word.

There is a God in heaven who specializes in bringing light in the middle of great darkness, hope in the midst of despair, and life in the grip of death. The last word is his and his alone. It's a word of hope. A word of peace. A word of love.

The last word is a word of love. That no matter what happens, God is there to care for us. That in the midst of suffering, God sent his Son to suffer alongside us, to die to redeem us, and to rise to justify us. Because of the cross of Christ, nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Paul writes to the Romans that nothing—Not trouble, not distress, not persecution, not famine, not nakedness, not danger, not sword can separate us from God. Not death. Not life. Not angels. Not earthly rulers. Not things happening now. Not things that might happen in the future. Not powers. Not height. Not depth. Nothing in all of creation.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God. No matter how isolated we may feel this morning or any morning, we are not alone.

God's love is a relentless love that goes beyond anything we can imagine. A love that destroys our sense of self-sufficiency and leaves us exposed and vulnerable, a sinful people without defense. A love that exposes a man whose sin is great but whose Savior is still greater. A love that crashes into my darkness and scatters it with eternal light. A love that has conquered sin. A love that has conquered Satan. A love that has conquered death. A love bound up in water and Word, in bread and wine, in body and blood. A love that reaches all the way to this place, to this moment. A love that looks you in the eye and proclaims without reservation, "You are never, ever alone."

Amen