

26th July 2020 6pm In God We Trust

Service led by Christine Haines, sermon by Andrew Haines

Bible reading by Gill Heath

This is only a copy of the reading and a transcript of the sermon.

Reading: Romans 8:26-39 [NIVUK 1984]

[Gill Heath:]

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. 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. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

‘For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ 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.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Sermon

[Andrew Haines:]

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our strength, and our redeemer.
Amen.

One of the things that I've been doing during this time of lockdown is writing a sermon each week which has gone out to various parishes in the area, who send it out on e-bulletins and printed news sheets, where they haven't had facilities to do Zoom and YouTube and things like that. And for the last few weeks we've been looking at Paul's letter to the Romans, particularly chapters 5 through 8, and that comes to a conclusion this evening. The last verses of chapter 8, which we

heard read to us, sum up all that's gone before in those four chapters. In fact, they sum up all that's gone before in all of those eight chapters, because Paul is setting out his beliefs as a Christian, his sort of, if you like, his Christian doctrine. He had never visited the church in Rome. He hoped to do so, and he was writing to them in advance of his planned visit, setting out the Gospel as he saw it, and he sets his stall out very early in chapter 1.

¹⁶ I am not ashamed of the gospel, (he says), because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...

And

¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

And he goes on through chapters 1, 2 and 3, setting out how that salvation is for everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, whatever our backgrounds. All of us have that same need to be saved by God, because, as he says in chapter 3, "All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory." We're saved by faith. What's the substance of that faith? It comes through at the end of chapter 4,

...for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."

So our faith is in Jesus crucified and risen. For that is the means of our new relationship and life with God. And so we move into those chapters 5 to 8, four chapters rather like the four movements of a great symphony, each with a different sort of tone and aspect of this subject, this theme of justification through faith.

Chapter 5: because we've been 'justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ'. We are saved by God's grace - His unmerited favour towards us - it is nothing that we deserve. God has acted for us, sending His Son to die for us in our place, when we were not worthy and could never ever be worthy.

Chapter 6 moves on again: it deals with a very popular heresy in the early days of the church and throughout the years: "Shall we go on sinning, that grace might increase?" Some people find it a very attractive idea that, as God loves to forgive us, the more we do wrong, the more He enjoys forgiving us. Well, that isn't really what it's about at all, is it? Because as we love God, in response to His love for us, we want to be people who live in a way that is pleasing to Him. Paul describes that as like a death and rising again. All of us who are baptised into Jesus, baptised into His death. Baptism is that symbolic dying and rising to new life, perhaps expressed best, of course, in those traditions that practice baptism by total immersion. But our practice of sprinkling is similar, signifying cleansing and renewal. We rise to a new life in Christ. And we live that life in the power that Jesus Himself gives to us.

As all great symphonies, one movement is slower and more reflective, and we come on to that in chapter 7, when Paul wrestles with the problem of our continuing human nature. We still live with that nature: the life of the Spirit and our human nature wrestle with each other. So often we know what is right, but we find ourselves not able to do it. And Paul reflects and meditates on that, and concludes that chapter 7 with a sort of plea, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" - a cry of anguish - but it resolves into a cry of triumph too, "Thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

And then chapter 8 begins with that great affirmation, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." A great chapter which deals with life in the Spirit. That power which raised Jesus from the dead is the power that is alive and at work within us, that enables us to live as the people of God in the world today. He sets out two lifestyles, two ways of life, just as Jesus Himself often

talked of two paths: not being able to serve two masters. So Paul sets it out rather like this: which way are we going to choose? Are we going to choose the way of life, which ultimately leads to death; the way of the world, doing what we please, reaching after the things that this world holds before us, seeking our own pleasure? This is the way of life that leads to death! Or do we seek the way of death that leads to life? Because we are followers of Jesus, His death was not to enable us to live a life of ease and luxury, but to live as His followers, and sometimes that does entail hardship, difficulty and suffering. That was certainly true in Paul's experience, and perhaps it has been so for very many of us too. We know those times. This chapter, chapter 8, of life in the Spirit, also tells us something about the whole of creation and God's purpose for it:

¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed (because) ¹⁹ The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

And God will complete His purpose in the fullness of time. Along with us, His people, the whole of creation will be renewed and made perfect. In the meantime, Paul says it's groaning out of a sense of frustration, incompleteness and brokenness. We too experience those same feelings - times of frustration, brokenness and incompleteness, as we contemplate the world around us.

That's where we picked up with our reading this evening. And it's exactly in those situations, that the Spirit helps us. "In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness." We don't always know what to pray, or how to pray. Perhaps we find it difficult during these days of pandemic to know what we should be praying for, how we should praise and pray in our prayers. That is when the Spirit is at work within us. He intercedes for us with that inner groaning that cannot be expressed in words. When we feel that yearning, that longing, "Why is the world as it, God? Why isn't something happening?" - it is there that the Spirit is crying out within us, and God the Father hears that unspoken prayer. God the Father is in communion with the Spirit within us: that prayer is heard, and that prayer is answered. Surely this is a great affirmation and encouragement at this time when everything around us seems to be so uncertain. We shouldn't be surprised by it. Jesus says these things will happen. But we should be praying through them. And we should be confident that God is there, and that we can trust Him moment by moment, and day by day.

In God We Trust: that expression which is on the face of every dollar bill in America. If you thought you were in for a lecture on the currency of the United States, then you're wrong, that's not what we're here for. But yet our trust is in God and the end of Romans chapter 8 sums up all that's gone before. Paul sums it up, telling us that in everything God works for good, for the good of those who love Him. We can be sure that He is there. We know that His purpose is being worked out, day by day. We're told by Paul that God foreknew us, each one of us is predestined to be His people. He's called us through His Word to belong to Him. We are His, he's justified us through faith in Jesus. Paul says He has glorified us. He's so confident that that glory will be revealed in the fullness of time, that he speaks of it as though it has already happened. These are the things that we **know**, this is what God has revealed to us. What can we say then? Well, Paul says, we can answer four questions, four challenging questions that come to us,

- Who is against us?
- Who will bring any charge against us?
- Who condemns us? And
- Who will separate us from the love of God?

And the answer to each of those four questions is a resounding "**no-one**", because we know that in every situation, God is with us and God is for us. In fact, if you ask that question, "Who is against us," it could be all sorts of people

against us. But they count for absolutely nothing when God is on our side. And He's demonstrated that being with us, His commitment to us, in the death of His Son on our behalf, He is God over all, and He will complete His work, in bringing us to glory with His Son.

The 2nd and 3rd questions take us into the realm of the law courts, "Who will bring any charge against us?" "Who will condemn us?" Again, all sorts of people might try to accuse and condemn us. In fact, we very often do it to ourselves. Christians are often very good at beating themselves up, and get guilt complexes about all sorts of things – ways we feel that we fall short. But God Himself has taken the charge. And He's diverted the sentence. Remember the way this chapter begins, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," Jesus took on Himself the whole weight of what might otherwise have condemned us, and He paid its penalty. And now He is still working on our behalf. He is there at the right hand of His Father interceding for us, praying for us. He is working on our behalf.

Lastly, "Who or what could separate us from the love of Christ?" Paul gives us that list of terrible hardships, of trouble or hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, or danger or sword. All of these things that might tempt us to fall away from our faith, all of these things and much more, all of them are things that Paul had faced in his own life, in his own experience. He has come through them, he has survived them in his own life and ministry. His experience in every situation was that God had held on to him and kept him safe.

There are times, perhaps, when we might feel that our grip on God is slipping. The truth is, His hold on us will never fail. We are secure in His hands. Paul began his summing-up with the words, "**We know**": "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him." "We know" – How well do we know that? He ends this chapter with a ringing affirmation: "**I am convinced**". He's convinced that nothing in time or space, anywhere at all, powers, dominions, people, nothing can separate us from the love of God. Are we in a position where we can say too, like Paul, not just, we know these things, but "**I am convinced.**" May we know for sure that Jesus is there interceding for us, that the Spirit is equipping and enabling us and working through us, that God the Father is in communion with that Spirit within us. Our lives our bound up in His. In God We Trust for this moment, for tomorrow, for the days and for the years ahead.

Amen.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>, with post-talk corrections by Andrew Haines]

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Please note: inclusive language was not introduced into the NIV until the 2011 edition.