

You Are Not Alone

St. Mark Lutheran
Two services

Pastor Ken Welsh
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And we know for those who love God all things work together for good, for those 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 among many brothers. 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 shall we say to these things? 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 also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death or 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. Romans 8:28-39

Has there ever been a time in your "walk with the Lord" when you knew you were a Christian, and you knew you were taking God seriously, and yet, you found your life in the middle of a great storm?

It happens, and I believe it happens often. And I believe it is happening with some of our members at St. Mark, even as we talk today.

So guided by the words from Romans 8, and relying on the guidance and blessing of the Holy Spirit, I would like to expand on a point I made in my message two weeks ago titled "Forever A Member of His Family". You may recall that I shared my list of the main four benefits of being a member of God's family. My fourth point was experiencing the presence of God in our life.

Believe it or not, today I am going to predict your future. And I am really convinced that what I tell you is completely accurate. So, I predict, for those that are believers, that God will be with you in the years ahead. Why am I so sure? I am sure because I am only repeating what God has already stated. It actually has been said many times and in many ways in the Holy Scriptures.

God stated this promise a long time ago to the nation of Israel. From Deuteronomy 31:8, I extracted these five phrases about God and his Old Testament people: 1) "The Lord himself goes before you"; 2) "and will be with you;" 3) "he will never leave you or forsake you;" 4) "do not be afraid;" 5) "do not be discouraged." As you sit here today, are you a believer in the Triune God? Then, you are not alone. God is with you always.

Two weeks ago I shared what God said to Israel and all the descendants of Abraham as recorded in Isaiah 41: "You are my servant; I have chosen you and not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (verses 9b-10) These words mean a great deal to me personally. I remember being on my back in an operating room and mentally saying these words to myself before being put to sleep for a serious operation. We, as believers in Christ, are not alone.

God spoke special words to his servant Joshua as he prepared to lead God's people in to the Promised Land. You may recall that most of the spies sent ahead by Joshua recommended that they NOT go into the promised land due to the kind of people that were living there. But God promised, "No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you or forsake you." They were not alone either. This promise appears to be a constant theme in regard to God's people in the Old Testament.

The New Testament continues the same theme. After his resurrection, as Jesus was preparing to leave his disciples, he said, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

But even without these words, we should know and draw comfort from the fact that God is not a trillion miles away from us, but he is present with us. "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" declares the Lord in Jeremiah 23:24. In 1 John 4 the apostle writes, "We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit." John goes on to say that "if anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God."

These words should really bring us great comfort as believers in Christ. His promise to us is clear. It can be summed up by his own words: "I will never leave you or forsake you." So does that mean that God has never forsaken anyone who belonged to Him? Has he ever left someone he cared about?

Well, yes, as a matter of fact, there was a person who was forsaken by God. Raise your hand if you know who that was!

It was Jesus as he was dying on the cross. The Holy Scriptures tell us that at about the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) In this unique miracle Jesus was crying out in anguish because of the separation he experienced from God the Father. This passage is the only one I know of where Jesus did not address God as the Father when speaking to him. It is widely believed that at this time the Son had taken the sins of the world upon himself, and God the Father turned away from that sin. So, by some means of God's omnipotent power, Jesus was separated from God for a brief time and became sin for those who believe in Him.

And that's just what 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Now while it is comforting to be told that God will always be with the believer and will not forsake him, some people hear or read that and go further than what the words actually say. They believe this means they will never face any great difficulties. Life for a Christian should be smooth sailing, so to speak. But God does not say that.

The famous author and theologian C. S. Lewis said, "I didn't go to religion to make me happy." He went on, "If you want a religion to make you comfortable...I certainly don't recommend Christianity." Why did C.S. Lewis say that?

Because Jesus himself declared that he came to earth "to give his life as a ransom for many". He did not promise that we would not suffer at times. He did not promise that a Christian would be exempt from serious trouble. Circumstances that can affect a believer are no better or worse than they are for anyone else.

We also should pick up that message from the words of Paul in Romans 8 this morning. He states, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.'" (verses 35-37) Sometimes our expectations of the Lord fall short because we have false expectations.

But we are never alone. We have the strength of God to draw on. He may, at times, for his divine reasons deliver us from the particular storm of life that we are in, but more often he will give us the strength we need in that storm. And we are witnesses to who we are and who He is in that storm. Paul reinforces that in his following words when he states, "...in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels (probably demons) 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."

I want to close this morning with a prayer. I am really using most of the first stanza from "Jesus, Lead Thou On" from pg. 718 of our hymn book. I have taken the liberty of changing two words so that it might better fit with our theme this morning. The changes are underlined for the benefit of those reading it. Please join me silently in this prayer: "Jesus, lead us on, till our rest is won; And even if the way be cheerless, help us follow calm and fearless; Guide us by your hand, to our fatherland." Amen.

