

I am Convinced

Rev. John Allen

This scripture gives voice the core of our faith.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Not hardship, nor distress, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword.

Not death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation.

None of it. Nothing. Will be able to separate us from the love of God.

Nothing that could happen to us could take God away from us.

There is no place we could go where we could escape God's love.

There is nothing we can do to keep God from loving us with all God's heart.

In fact not even death, not even death, can separate us from the love of God.

—

One of the most painful tragedies of this pandemic has been all the separation.

We have been separated from our joy, with the special occasions missed, and the ordinary pleasures of life made frustratingly complicated.

We have been separated from ourselves, our routines disrupted, patterns broken, boundaries falling left and right.

Perhaps as this drags on we feel separated from a hopefulness or optimism we often held onto with greater ease.

And of course we are separated from each other. The now routine separation from family and friends.

And perhaps hardest of all, have been those who have come to the end of their lives, unable to be surrounded by family, saying goodbye on a screen to the people whose love has defined their lives. Of course even in the best of times, we still experience the death of those we love as an almost unbearable separation. Separation to this extreme just feels cruel.

All this separation.

—

And now we are holding our breath in the days before an extraordinarily consequential election. We are all, I think, feeling the uncertainty and the dread that comes with not knowing what will happen in this defining event in our common life.

And beyond just any outcome that we might fear, many of us are also carrying fear of how our nation will *respond* to the outcome.
Here too, we are living with the agony of separation.

—

So Paul's words are meant to come to us in a moment like this as a ray of hope, a balm of comfort.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Nothing on that long list of somethings.

Hardship, distress, persecution, peril, sword, death.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Feel better?

Maybe a little. But I think in a moment of such deep anxiety and dread. In a moment shot through with such fear and doubt. In a moment where we are all cut off from the things that ordinarily sustain us when we are stressed.

Even these most beautiful and soaring words—words that have brought me great comfort and courage again and again at other points in my life—they don't quite cut through.

No, when I was sitting with this text this week, my faith found an anchor in three words that I had scarcely noticed before. Three words that it would be easy to just gloss right over.

Paul does not merely offer these words as detached truisms.

I am convinced. He says.

I am convinced, that nothing in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

These are not abstract teachings.

This is his testimony.

You know before he was the Paul who founded these churches and wrote these letter's. He was Saul, a persecutor of Christians. He was an agent of state-sanctioned violence. He was part of atrocities. He was party to murder.

Nevertheless, God chose him as this essential messenger and teacher.

And after his conversion. He was a man nearly always on the run. He spent several stints in prison. Narrowly escaped execution. He was shipwrecked in the Mediterranean more than once.

Paul has some kind of physical infirmity that we never learn the true nature of, he calls it just a "thorn in my flesh" maybe some kind of limp or chronic pain.

And many who he counted as his closest friends met their death as martyrs during his life.

In short he has known most of the things on his list.

Hardship, distress, persecution, peril, sword, death.

And I am convinced. He says. I am convinced that none of it. That nothing. Can separate us from the love of God.

And if he is convinced. So am I.

—

Remember that the Bible was not dropped out of the sky into our hands. These ancient words that Paul wrote in a Letter to a church in Rome have been carried to us across nearly 100 generations.

And the only reason that these words have reached our ears, is because in each of those generations there were people who read them, read them through all the experiences life threw at them, through plagues and political unrest, and so much more.

In each of these generations there were people who read these words and said, "yes. I am convinced." And passed them to their children.

So these words are in no small part made holy to us by the accumulated testimony to their truth. Generation after generation.

I am convinced.

I am convinced.

I am convinced.

Hardship, distress, persecution, peril, sword, death.

And I am convinced. I am convinced that none of it. That nothing. Can separate us from the love of God.

—

We are living through a monumental moment right now. And it matters what happens. It truly does.

The outcome of this election matters.

How we treat one another matters.

The lives cut short by this pandemic matter.

That we confront the sin of racism matters.

What we do each day matters. How we treat each other matters.

All this matters.

Having confidence in God' unshakable love for us is not some quiet comfort for us to rest upon, it is the truth that steels our courage so that we can go out and love this world with abandon, fight for its healing, insist on its highest hope.

To give it everything we've got. To help bend this world toward justice. To build communities where love is unmistakable.

—

And as we do all that. There will be triumphs and downfalls. There will be moments that feel like 2 steps forward. And moments that feel like 10 steps back.

There will be heartbreaks. Losses.

There will be hardship, distress, persecution, peril, sword, death.

And as you meet it. Hear me say. I am convinced. None of it. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love.

And not just me here all those, all those across generations and throughout the world. Who have met these things. Who have seen what we are seeing, and worse.

And who have taken into their hands these words:

Nothing will separate us from the love of God. And said to us, "Yes. I am convinced."