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Text: Romans 8:28 – 39
Title: God, In Love, Ruling Over Ruins

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. One of England's great cathedrals is Coventry Cathedral which contains a massive tapestry the size of a tennis court that was made over 3 years by 12 artists led by Graham Sutherland. The scene is Christ enthroned in glory, and surrounding Him is a band of gold that branches out into the four corners with the symbols of the Gospel writers. These four evangelists give us a vision of Christ ruling over the fallen world.

What the artists did with thread in this tapestry is what the apostle Paul does with words in Romans. Today, we consider one of the most beautiful passages in Romans. St. Paul has woven together all of God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – with all of creation – death and life, angels and demons, present and future, things seen and unseen. All of God rules over all of creation in love. That's what St. Paul wants us to know as he continues the story of God, which is not an ending or a beginning, but is a glorious re-creation of all things and the final victorious revelation of God's people as more than conquerors in His love.

And when we read these words of the apostle Paul, something interesting happens. It's as if Paul invites us upward so that we are with the figure of Christ in the tapestry and, from there, has asked us to turn around and see what Christ sees. Paul wants us to see the world through the eyes of Christ because he knows that vision will change your life.

So often, when we come to church, we come with a limited vision of God. We look at God through the experience of our lives and that limits what we see. Did He answer my prayers this week? Did He give me strength to deal with work? To handle the kids? God can become

small to us. Small enough to fit Him into our lives, just once a week on Sunday. Paul wants us to reverse that view. We don't fit God into our lives. God brings us to Him: His life, His love, His rule over all. Paul asks us to see the world through the eyes of Jesus, risen from the dead and ruling in love. Turn your eyes to see the world through the eyes of Jesus. Let St. Paul bring you to God, in love, ruling over ruins. Because that is what Paul helps us see this morning. God in His Love is ruling over our ruins.

Paul's words remind us of the ruins of this world. The ruins outside the Christian and the ruins inside each of us. Paul names those things people fear would separate them from God. Tribulation, distress, and persecution. Famine and nakedness. Danger and sword. And these are not just words for the apostle Paul. He is naming the reality of what he has been through for Christ. St. Paul is traveling to Jerusalem, carrying a gift for the poor suffering from a famine. He has been in prison. He has suffered tribulation and danger. He knows how the world fights against God's people. The evils, however, are not only those that stand outside the Christian. Paul knows there is evil that flows from within. He stood there as Stephen was stoned to death, and he approved of the execution. Paul knows this hatred and abuse from the inside. He knows his guilt before God. He knows his sin.

In this section of his letter, Paul invites us to bring it all before God – the evil that stands outside of you, the forces that threaten to destroy you, the loss of a job, the death of a child, the tragedies you know you will never get over. Paul invites you to bring these before God. But he also asks you to be honest about the evil within you. We stand before God, suffering from a world in ruins but also suffering from our own sins. The distance between you and your son, the anger between you and a co-worker, the greed that causes you to turn a blind eye to others in need. Paul asks you to bring all of it before God, the evil without, the evil within, to gather it up

and place it before His throne, sure that there is not enough time or space to hold all of the evil and suffering we bring. Why? Because Paul knows what God in Christ is bringing to you. His Love. While you bring all of your evil before God, God brings all of His love to you. This is Paul's insight. He knows that God is ruling over the ruins of this world in love.

If you were to go to Coventry Cathedral and stand there, below the tapestry, looking away from it, toward the church, it is amazing what you would see. As Jesus looks from the tapestry, he sees a church in ruins. Because Coventry Cathedral is literally built upon ruins. On November 14, 1940, the city of Coventry was bombed by the Nazis in the Battle of Britain. In one night, this cathedral, where people had worshipped for almost 900 years, was reduced to charred wood and ruined stones in columns of smoke.

Two charred timbers were found on the ground in the shape of a cross. The cross was placed on top of a pile of rubble. Behind them, they placed the words, "Father forgive." Then, a new cathedral was built extending off of the old ruins. On the tapestry at the altar of the new section, Jesus sits on His throne facing the ruins. There, behind where the people sit in the new sanctuary are the ruins of the old one behind a wall of glass. On the glass are images of angels and saints; figures from the Old and New Testaments; and martyrs of the past and the present. Jesus, enthroned in glory, looks out over a fallen world. But His vision is one of hope. He sees the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. And through that glass are the charred remains of a cross, the place where God's love was made visible to all people.

Christ sees you from His throne, living in a world ruined by sin. You live among wars and rumors of wars. At times, you are victims of suffering, and at other times, Christ sees that you are evil toward others. This world would ask us to give up, to clear away the ruins, to forget about God and about this suffering and sin and go on. And many try to do that. But St. Paul invites you

to stay, and to stand before God, in your sin and suffering, known and unknown. Why? Because Paul knows the One who rules over all. He knows Jesus. And Paul knows that this Jesus who sees all has given all of Himself for you.

At the heart of all that suffering and sin is the cross and the moment of redemption, when Jesus Christ gave His sinless life for our sinful flesh. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus defeated the powers of sin and hell and death itself and claimed you as His own. God is for you. Paul asks, “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn?” Earlier St. Paul wrote, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

Paul sees the heart of this love and how far it goes. God’s love spans our entire life, as Paul writes, “for those whom he foreknew, he also predestined . . . and those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called, he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” Then, Paul sees that Christ rules over all of creation in love. He writes, “all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose...I am sure that neither 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 will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Paul knows that we are immersed, daily, in a ruined creation, but he asks us to see this vision of Christ enthroned in glory. It is a vision that gives us hope, and hope can be a very hard thing to live in. Every day, we are confronted by the suffering of our world and the sins of our flesh. Listen to the news; you can hear the suffering. Look at your heart; you can see the sin. For some, the temptation is to despair. They are tempted to give up, to lose hope, to believe that God has not conquered and to try to fend for themselves. For others, the temptation is to have foolish

hope. They take a text like this one from Romans, and try to dismiss the reality of pain and suffering. “All things work together for good,” they say, and it doesn’t matter whether they are speaking to a mother who has lost her son or a father who struggles to raise his children after a divorce. “All things work together for good,” they say, and yet their words don’t recognize the real pain and evil in front of them. The Christian life in this world is neither of these options. It is actually a paradox – a strange combination of glory and suffering. We are certain of the glorious future that God has in store for us. We know and trust God’s promise that all things work together for good, but we also see the reality of suffering in this world and are moved to compassion for those going through it. Seeing the ruins of this world, we do not give up hope. And seeing the hope of the future, we do not deny the suffering of this world. Instead, we live in both worlds – in the reality of suffering and in the certainty of hope in Christ’s love.

And this love of Christ continues, long after our time is over. The apostle Paul reminds us that “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.” Often when artists depict Jesus in glory, His hand is raised in blessing. That is not what you see on the cathedral tapestry. There you see Jesus, sitting with both hands raised in prayer. This Jesus who died and rose and rules over all things intercedes for you. As you make your way home and enter another week, He continues to pray for you. Jesus takes your suffering and burdens, your sins and sorrows, and presents them in prayer to His Father. Nothing you encounter, nothing you bring, can ever separate you from God. Neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus your Lord. We are more than conquerors in Jesus who rules over these ruins in love. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.