

For Us and With Us

Romans 8:31-39

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.



There is something powerful and beautiful about holding someone else's hand. Picture these scenarios in your mind: a new parent holding the tiny hand of their newborn son or daughter; a teacher holding the hand of a timid kindergarten student as they cross the parking lot; a brave teenager reaching out their hand to help someone who has fallen or been hurt in competition; a young man giving a hand to help an elderly couple clean up after Hurricane Ian; a young but nervous couple holding hands for the first time on a date; an excited husband and wife standing before a pastor on their wedding day, hand in hand; an elderly but tired man holding the hand of his beloved wife of many decades; a family holding the hand of their loved one as he or she passes from this life to eternal life.

Today is LWML Sunday. As you may be aware, "LWML" stands for "Lutheran Women's Missionary League." It is an auxiliary organization of our Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod and has members throughout North America. Truly, they are a missionary organization, sponsoring mission efforts reaching people around the world.

Their loving hands fold together in prayer that God would rescue lost sinners through the saving message of His Son Jesus Christ. Their loving hands lift up other women who are sad, lonely or depressed and help them know of the God who is for them in Jesus Christ. They gather for Bible study, rallies and events encourage one another and work together in the Lord in His kingdom of love.

Their loving hands fill the mite boxes, just like the poor widow in the Bible who gave two mites, two coins, all that she had, out of love for the Lord. And those mites that are gathered to support the work of the Lord where feeble hands are lifted by our powerful loving God! For decades, the LWML has given a strong witness to how God's love holds each of us.

Our text for this LWML Sunday is the epistle lesson chosen for today. I'd like us to consider the two questions raised by the apostle Paul in Romans 8:31: "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Notice the main person, the subject. It is God. You'll see this clearly in our text from Romans 8. Sometimes it is tempting to think that our success depends on our grip, our hold, or our heroism. It may be subtle, but it's a slippery slope in our lives. Thoughts of self-dependence or "thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought" can open the door to believing we are the main people in God's narrative. But the apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, gives a different perspective. He makes it quite clear that God's everlasting love holds us. When we are insufficient, He is all-sufficient.

Our outline for today's sermon on this LWML Sunday is simple but significant:

Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have no fear of condemnation.

Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have no fear of separation.

Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have certainty of victory.

Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have no fear of condemnation.

Paul writes: *"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?"* (Romans 8:31-32).

What things? **Paul has just acknowledged that God has done everything for our salvation.** He elected us, called us, justified us and gives us our eternal glory!

Therefore, how should we respond? God IS for us. There can be no doubt about this!

Since God is for us, what shall we say about these things? Paul continues with these words:

"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." (Romans 8:33-34)

Why did Jesus die? To pay for our sins! Why was he raised? Because the Father accepted this payment; in other words, the check has cleared! It didn't bounce and it was not found to have insufficient funds. He died so we might live.

And now, Jesus is interceding for us, fully engaged in the battle for us. I love the way that Corrie ten Boom, a Christian woman who shared the love of God during the horrors of WWII said: *"There is no pit so deep, that God's love is not deeper still."*

Think about this personally, in your own life. What pits have you fallen into? Who of us in the past week has been perfect? How many of us have said things we would later regret? Or, have you spoken to a loved one in a tone you wish you could take back?

Have you been divisive in any way? Yes, me too. Yes, to all of the above. The law is convicting because the law shows us exactly where we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The pit is pretty deep...but God's love is deeper still. His arm is long and able to rescue us; He stretches out His hand and lifts us out of the pit of our sin.

Indeed, his stretched-out arms on the cross of Calvary DID rescue us. Those same arms were made alive again as Jesus was raised from the dead.

Indeed, in Jesus deepest anguish on the cross, His Father lifted Him from the horrible pit of our sin.

Psalm 40:2 He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps.

Jesus is for us and with us. Even though Satan wants to accuse and condemn you, the action of Jesus is evident – and the result is clear: we have no fear of condemnation. Jesus rose from the dead. Sin, death and the devil and all condemnation have been conquered!

The important mission of LWML shares this life-saving and life-giving truth with the world. For many decades, through LWML, Gospel seeds have been sown. The Holy Spirit is at work!

That leads us to the next major point in our text:

Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have no fear of separation. In your mind picture again, hands joined together. God will not let go of your hand!

As I watched the stories of those this past week who suffered from Hurricane Ian, two stories stood out in my mind. First, there was the video of a woman who was struggling to get out of the mud. Another woman was holding her hand and pulling her. She could barely move but she they didn't give up. After several tries she finally got free.

Then there was the story of a man and a dog who were trapped in their home when the surge water came suddenly rushing in. It filled the room leaving but a few feet of air below the ceiling. The man held the dog up for 4 hours on his shoulders and hands until help came for them. We struggle to not be separated from the people and animals that we love, but we are weak and there are also stories of people still frantically trying to locate their loved ones in the aftermath of the hurricane.

Paul continues in chapter 8: *"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 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." (Romans 8:35-39)

Notice what Paul does not say in this text. He does not say that life will be free of challenges and difficult circumstances. He does not say that distress or danger will not happen. In fact, he writes in great detail elsewhere (including 2 Corinthians) about his own experience in facing these challenges.

We know this from our own experiences as well. Each of us could make a list of our own struggles of daily living. What would your list look like? What would you include? Who would you include? In many ways, you might feel like so much is stacked against you right now. But God declares you righteous (Romans 8:33) and loved in Jesus (Romans 8:39). Our assurance comes from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Our Lutheran Women in Mission have served many people for many years, whose lives seem out of control. But God is always in control, and by His Holy Spirit, has chosen to use them and all of us to

serve others in love, God's love. And God's Word assures us that nothing, not a hurricane or any other power can separate us from His love!

With no fear of condemnation or separation, we come to our third point:

Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have certainty of victory. That victory is made yours personally through the gift of baptism. St. Paul says in Romans 6:4: *"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."* Baptism equals victory: victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil. We are more than conquerors; we are super-victorious! One of my favorite hymns – and maybe one of yours – says this well:

"No strength of ours can match his might. We would be lost, rejected. But now a champion comes to fight, Whom God Himself elected. You ask who this may be? The Lord of hosts is He, Christ Jesus, mighty Lord, God's only Son, adored. He holds the field victorious." (LSB 657, v. 2)

Our victory is not secure because of our hold on Christ, but by His hold on us. We are more than conquerors because He holds tightly to us. Therefore, we may live each day, including today, confidently trusting in Jesus. As a baptized child of God, remain in His Word. Be reminded of your identity as a victorious one in Christ. Rely on His grace. How have you been saved? By grace through faith. And respond to His call. Like Isaiah the prophet, may we enthusiastically say: *"Here am I! Send me."* (Isaiah 6:8b).

Send me to help a person in need, give someone a hand that is struggling. Send me and give me the opportunity to tell of Your love that removed condemnation for our sin, will keep us from ever being separated from you, and gives us the victory, eternal victory in Christ!

Lutheran Women in Mission, thank you for your hearts and hands that have shared the Gospel with many around the world. Thank you for responding to the call of Jesus. Thank you for your example and encouragement to each of us. May our God continue to hold us in His love, the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.