

July 30, 2023
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Romans 8:28-39 (Matthew 13:44-52)

GOD IF FOR YOU!

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

In our epistle text this morning, St Paul says:

“If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31)

But you do not have to look very far to begin to wonder: *“Is God really for us? Just how far away God could actually be?”* The world we live in is a mess. Our country is a mess. The number of Americans living in homeless shelters or on the streets is rising at an alarming rate. The number of those with serious mental health problems continues to rise just as quickly.

Injustice and suffering seem to be natural. At all levels, from nations all the way down to individual relationships, the ***strong*** push around the ***weak***. The ***capable*** take what they want from the ***incapable***. The ***powerful*** impose their selfish will on the ***fragile***. Lifestyles that just a few years ago were thought to be absurd, perverse, and preposterous are today celebrated and enshrined into public policy. If you do not down bow and worship these abominations that openly mock God, you will be publicly humiliated as bigoted and phobic. If you own a Christian business and refuse to lease your talents to those celebrating pagan rituals, you will be dragged into court by the alphabet soup activists for prosecution.

It is a world where children get sick or are injured, neglected, or abducted and abused. People of all ages and persuasions receive medical diagnoses that forecast trials and tribulation. Others receive news that death is on the horizon due to heart disease, lung disease, infection, or cancer. We do not like to think about it, but it happens all the time. It is part of living in a broken and sinful world.

As a matter of fact, regardless of how healthy your doctor says you are – you and I and all mankind are born with a death sentence. Unless Jesus returns really soon, everyone faces the simple, stark reality that everyone dies. The wages of sin is death (cf: Romans 6:23) and all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (cf: Romans 3:23) Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return. (cf: Genesis 3:19) So, you look around and wonder: *“Is God really for us? Just how far away God could actually be?”*

St Paul says:

“Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect?...³⁴ Who is to condemn?”
(cf: Romans 8:33–34)

With his words, St Paul paints courtroom imagery. You believe yourself to be innocent. But there you are, seated in the chair of the accused. Satan himself is the accuser and prosecuting

attorney. His name means *adversary*. (BDB, 966) And while you believe yourself to be blameless, he presents all the evidence and witnesses against you.

The first witness to bring a charge is your cell phone. It tells of all the times have you been fixated on your phone while driving down the road, putting other drivers at risk... or the hours and hours you spend on it while neglecting to read God's Word... or pray... or serve and love your neighbor... or care for a friend or loved one in need.

The next witness to condemn you is your internet provider. He reveals the history of all the emails you have sent and received... all the places you have wandered on the internet... the productive and the evil... all the hours you spent on social media where, rather than putting the best construction on personal matters, you post false testimony against your neighbors, criticizing them and belittling them.

The next witness is a security camera that recorded a salesclerk just trying to be helpful – but you were rude and impatient, not knowing the suffering and injustices they were experiencing in their own life. Your words caused the clerk to go home early and self-medicate or self-harm. Next is the tape recording of you that was “*made for quality assurance*” from a business that you phoned. You were displeased with their service. The entire courtroom listens to you berating and belittling the customer service representative who was just trying to do their job. Next, your friend or family member comes forward telling of how you betrayed their confidence when breaking your promise. They tell of the vile and hurtful words you hurled at them, leaving your relationship in shambles.

Finally, the prosecution rests. You sit there accused, charged, and condemned. You are thinking: “*How can God possibly be for me? How far away must His love really be?*” It is bad enough that you must endure the injustice cast upon you by the selfish and evil people in this world. And while it might appear unfair that you were born with a death sentence due to the inherited sin from your ancestor Adam – but the devil and God's Law confronts you with your actual sin, what you have done and what you have left undone. And if that is not enough, every day your sick and diseased and dying body reminds your that death is soon coming for you.

Dear baptized believer in Christ, take heart when St Paul says:

“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 8:32)

How can you be certain that God is for you? You know that did not choose God – but He chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world. (cf: Ephesians 1:4) He adopted you and planted faith in you in baptismal waters. He has loved and continues to love you with an everlasting love. You know that God is for you because He did not spare His own Son, but handed Him over into a brutal death on Calvary's cross in your stead. If God is going have His own Son put to death to save you from your sins, how will He not also graciously give you all things?

Jesus describes this in our Gospel parables this morning. Like all of Jesus' parables in Matthew's Gospel describing the kingdom of heaven or kingdom of God, except for the short one at the very end of our text, they describe what is it like when God comes down into the world in Christ

Jesus to reign as King. In the original language when Jesus says: “... *the kingdom of heaven is like...*” or the “... *kingdom of God is like...*” this *kingdom* gives the sense of a King coming to reign among His people. Concordia Commentator Dr. Jeffery Gibbs writes:

“If ‘the reign of heaven/God’ stands near, then the God of heaven has come down to reign, to perform his kingly deeds. Thus, the reign of God is not primarily a place. Rather, it is a divine action that occurs where Jesus is, through his words and deeds.” (Gibbs, Matthew 1:1–11:1, Concordia Commentary, 49)

In the parable Jesus describes you as the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value. As the hidden treasure, Jesus saw you dead in your sin and trespasses, buried in the grave dead six feet under. In His joy, He humbled Himself, leaving the glory of heaven so that He could take on human flesh and blood – and then give that flesh and blood away to purchase the graveyard where you lay so that He might exhume your dead body and grant you new life in Him.

Jesus saw you as the Pearl of Great Value. Not that you are any better or worse than the other pearls... but that He loves you has chosen you to be His treasured possession. (cf: Deuteronomy 7:6–8) Nothing can separate you from His love. (cf: Romans 8:37-39) He willingly gave up everything, His very life to purchase you and make you His own. You were purchased:

“... not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ...” (1 Peter 1:18-19)

So, perhaps you are thinking that, if God is for you, why must you endure the suffering and injustice of the world. Why must you experience sickness and disease until your death sentence is carried out? St Paul says:

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

It is hidden within the wise council of God how exactly He works all things, even evil things, for good. All that is truly good is from the hand of God. He is the giver of every good and perfect gift. (cf: James 1:17) But this verse does not mean that everything which happens in this fallen world comes directly from the hand of God. He cannot be blamed for whatever wickedness or disease you encounter. Yet nothing happens outside of His purview. He remains in control over His entire creation, even over all the forces of evil.

Many of the tragic events in the world are simply the result of sin and creation’s bondage to corruption. (cf: Romans 8:21) To the sinful human eye and reason, these events seem to be contrary to the good will of God. But just as in the Old Testament, Joseph’s brothers sought to kill him and then resolved to sell him into slavery (cf: Genesis 37:18–28) – the brother’s intent was evil against Joseph, but God meant it for good, to preserve the lives of his family on earth. (cf: Genesis 45:5–7, 50:20)

Of course sickness, death, natural disasters, and all other calamities are not “*good*” in and of themselves. Why our gracious God still allows them often remains hidden from us. But in the face of even the direst of circumstances, Scripture teaches that God is in control. Rather than

dwell on the circumstances of the sufferings of this world, asking if those who suffer the tragedies of life are worse sinners than other people, Jesus answers this question twice, saying:

“No, I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” (Lk 13:3, 5)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, repent. Repent and turn from your sinful ways, Busy yourself with trusting in God that He has called you according to His purpose. You were created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand, that you should walk in them, (cf: Ephesians 2:10) serving and loving your neighbor just as God in Christ serves and loves you.

At the beginning of Romans, chapter 8, St Paul writes:

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

(Romans 8:1)

How can you be sure? You have God’s Word.

Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Who shall separate you from the love of Christ? (cf: Romans 8:35) No One! Nothing! In all things you are more than conquerors through Christ Jesus who loves you. He came in the flesh and blood of man so that He could suffer God’s entire wrath and pay the wages of your sins. He is not a God that stands far off. He is a God that is for you and still comes to you in His Word and Sacrament. He bids you come unto Him all you who are heavy laden and He will give you rest. (cf: Matthew 11:28–29) He bids you come, take eat, take drink, His very body and blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins and to strengthen your faith as you face the injustices and sufferings of this world. God is for you. He did not spare his own Son but gave him up for you. How will He not also with Him graciously give you all things? Nothing in all creation is able to separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus your Lord.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, Amen.