

7.26.20 L17P9 God Clings to Us

- When we read the scriptures, we can't help but see its message through a lens that has been shaped by the experience of our lives
 - When we encounter scripture, whatever is happening in the world around us – that is the CONTEXT of the world that becomes a filter that makes certain words and phrases pop out at us
 - So when we hear the scripture, we can't help but to hear it with ears attuned to the joys and sorrows of our daily lives
- This is especially true for today's reading from Paul's letter to the Romans
- In fact, many of you have heard me read and preach on this text before in a very different context, because this biblical passage is often read and preached at funerals
 - And in the context of a funeral, so soon after someone whom we love has died, the words that jump out at us from these verses are: "For I am convinced that not even death... can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. [8:38-39]"
 - But today we are not gathered for a funeral when we need the assurance that not even death will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord
 - Instead, we are gathered here on a Sunday during a viral pandemic, when we need the assurance not only of God's love after death, but especially the assurance for God's love now, in this world... we need the assurance of God's love now, in our lives... we need to hear that God's love doesn't leave or abandon us during the threat of a virus
- It wasn't that long ago that we heard about a distant virus that was wreaking havoc in far-away places like China and Korea
 - Then we heard that it was spreading through countries in Europe, like in Italy
 - And then the virus made its way to American cities like Seattle and New York
 - And now the coronavirus has made its way to just about everywhere, even to Schuylkill Haven, including to family members of our congregation

- And the fallout from the virus has not only been way too many deaths – the fallout from the virus has been massive employment and economic uncertainty
- And the uncertainty did not end with economic uncertainty
 - Back to school will look very different this year
 - Going grocery shopping has become much more of an adventure
 - People at risk have been sheltering at home
 - Other people have been behaving badly and putting the public at risk
 - Healthcare in many places has been overwhelmed
 - Government and politics have been divided
 - And even church sure doesn't look and feel like it used to, and there is no end yet in sight
- In the midst of all this, in lives that right now are shaped, and ears that right now are attuned to the daily news filled with the latest facts or rumors about the coronavirus pandemic, *listen to this assurance in this anxious and uncertain time during this coronavirus pandemic:* “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶... ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor 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. [8:35-39]”
- If Paul were here today, no doubt he would have also said that we need not fear that the covid pandemic will somehow be able to separate us from the love of God.
- The witness from today's scripture reading is simply this – that nothing can separate us from the love of God
 - This means that God's love CLINGS to us despite the fact that world and our lives seem to have been turned upside down
 - And in the midst of it all, God's love most clearly revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, does not break, God's love does not abandon, and instead, God's love CLINGS to us
- As you know, Martin Luther said many things, and we who are Lutherans like to quote him.

- But today, I would like to quote his wife, Katherine, or Katie
 - A remarkable woman in her own right who not only loved her temperamental husband Martin, raised their large family, fed poor students and raised orphans, and managed the Luther's property and employees – let's not forget that Katie was a devout Christian who read the scriptures and was shaped by its gospel-witness throughout her life
 - Years after Martin died, Katie Luther was in a traffic accident and was thrown from a wagon and severely injured
 - In the days leading up to her death from those injuries, thinking about burrs – burrs, those prickly things that get stuck in the fur of our pets, or on our clothing if we walk through the weeds – thinking about burrs Katie said to her friends, "I WILL CLING TO CHRIST AS A BURR CLINGS TO A COAT."
 - That's a wonderful image spoken by a faithful woman... but the really Good News that we hear in Paul's letter to the Romans is that *even before Katie's faith*, God revealed in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ had already promised *to cling to Katie...* and also in the promise of our baptisms into Christ crucified and raised, Jesus has lovingly promised to cling and stick to us
 - Because as Saint Paul asks us to remember today and always, "nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."