

Sermon from Pentecost Sunday 2009 – (we also had two young women, ‘J’ and ‘J’ make a public profession of their faith.) The sermon was the concluding message in a series from Romans 8

Romans 8:38,39

“I have been persuaded that **nothing** shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

One of the most helpful tools for Bible study is something called an “interlinear Bible”. With an interlinear, every other line is the original language, Hebrew or Greek, then in between is the English translation as literal as you could ever ask for. It does not make for a very flowing read, but if you are doing some Bible study and trying to listen as closely to the original as you can, an interlinear is awesome. You don’t need to be a Greek scholar, and much of the time the interlinear is going to say just about what you have in your own Bible. But here and there, you will find some cool discoveries.

I think we have one this morning:

In our Bibles, Paul says, “I am convinced that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord”.

That’s an awesome statement of faith. It is a statement about the present state of Paul’s mind. “I am convinced”. I completely believe this to be true. No discussion.

Here’s what the interlinear shows us:

pepeismai
peithO
vi Perf Pas 1 Sg
I-HAVE-been-PERSUADED

Does that sound different to you, than “I am convinced”?

It does to me.

I find myself drawn into Paul’s story.

I find myself wanting to ask, “How were you persuaded Paul?” “Persuaded” gives the sense that there was a time when maybe you were not persuaded, but something happened to persuade you.

What happened to you that you have come to believe that in this crazy, messed up and broken world, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus?

We have enough of his story in the Bible that we can know that if he were here, Paul would likely tell us things like this:

“Jesus knocked me flat on my butt. He blinded me with his glory. He sent someone to me who called me ‘brother Saul’ and helped me to see that our whole Bible, what you call the Old Testament is an introduction to Jesus.

Ananias helped me to see that Jesus Christ loved me and gave his life for me. (Galatians 2:20) He helped me to see that Jesus Christ is making all things new.

I have seen many people come to know God’s love in Jesus.

But it was mostly in the hard stuff that I became persuaded that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Once Silas and I were attacked by a mob and thrown in jail in Thyatira. They had ripped our clothes off, beaten us, and put our feet in the stocks. That night we were praying and singing songs of praise to God. There was an earthquake, the whole jail shook, the doors broke open and our chains fell off.

The jailer thought we had escaped so he was going to kill himself. I told him we were all there. He and his family ended up becoming followers of Jesus.

When his little boy brought soap and water for our wounds and said, "I want to follow Jesus too!" That did it for me.

How many stories would you like? I could tell you a whole lot more, but then I knew that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord." I was persuaded.

In every story of each of our lives God is at work. We have learned in Romans 8 that God is at work with his Holy Spirit. He is at work to comfort us, to assure us, to help us and here, to persuade us of his love in Jesus Christ our Lord.

I'd like to think with you about how God has done that in our lives. First though, let's remember some of what is in that word 'love'.

It's what the Old Testament calls the "loving-kindness" of God. Some translations speak of the "steadfast" love of the Lord. It is solid love, unshakeable love, love that never quits and is always full of mercy.

God' love is 'always' love for you and me.

That is the love God has for us in Christ Jesus.

It also means esteem, God esteem's us or holds us in high value.

God holds us in high value. No matter what we think of ourselves or what others may say or think about us, we are precious to God. We matter to God.

It is to cherish. Cherish is the word God chooses to describe how he feels about you and me. It is a tender, passionate word.

God cherishes you and me.

Favour. God favours you and me. Favour is special love, particular love. It is the undeserved love of grace. William Young (The Shack) has given us the amazing phrase, "papa is especially fond of... you, and papa is especially fond of me". It means that his love is somehow particular and personal to each one of us.

Honour. Who am I, who are you, that God, the creator of the universe and all possible worlds, should think of us, come to us, visit us, live with us, send his Son to die and rise for us? God honours you and me with his love.

Respect. Real love has in it the quality of respect. Someone might tell us they love us, but they are trying to control us, or manipulate us. We might do the same, even with good intentions. God does not force us to love or to trust, even as he works to persuade us that he will always love us.

Accept. God welcomes you and me with open arms. Jesus told a story once about the father with two sons. The younger one ran off with half of the family fortune. When he blew it all and came dragging home the father (God) ran down the driveway and didn't even wait for an apology before hugging and holding his son. God accepts you and me.

Concern. To be concerned about someone is to notice what they are going through and in some way to take part of their burden or struggle into your heart and take action to help them. God's love means that God is concerned about you and me. Our lives, our hurts, our struggles and battles and fears matter to him.

Most of all, God shows us his love in this: "While we were yet sinners, Jesus Christ died for us."

"I have been persuaded", says Paul, "that nothing shall separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord".

It is the story of the Bible.

And it is the story of each of our lives, God is at work to persuade us.

How has God persuaded you? Or is he still working to convince you?

I asked myself that question. I can say that I have been persuaded but to say exactly when or how is difficult. There has been so much grace. I was raised to be soaked in the Bible. In the Bible I met the God who keeps on saying, "I am with you". I came to realize that God knows all about all of my sins and still loves me. That Jesus gave his life for me. Being surprised to find myself married to Audrey, with the kids we have been given and the life I've been given as your pastor. Seeing answers to prayer.

I asked my friend T__ if he is persuaded and how that happened. He said he is and that it happened as he has walked with the Bible, seeing how life fits together.

I asked A_____ because she was cleaning the church at the time. “How has God persuaded you that nothing can separate you from his love?”.

She said it was when she was single and found out she was pregnant with J_____ and realized that God was the only one who knew how she was feeling and what was going on inside her. And that God put the people in her life that she needed, especially at that time, E_____ and Y_____.

I asked A___ D_____. Anne has had many close calls with death, an appendix that ruptured when she was seven, bombs in the second world war and cancer. A_____ said, “I was persuaded gradually over time”. She agreed that the constant love of God was like a treasure she didn’t know she had until she had to turn to him in times of trouble.

I asked B__ and H_____ P_____.

B__ said that trusting in God came slowly to him. He didn’t have an experience like Paul. His wife brought their first three children for baptism by herself because he had not made profession of faith. By that time he was 27.

H___ said that when she was 20 and had her first daughter she started to take her faith more seriously. She said that she knows God’s love is always with her, even though the tough times are still tough.

I asked E_____ M_____... E_____ said that in her opinion, when you are young you don’t really know how much God loves you. She says that she didn’t think that deeply about her faith as a child but that now she sees God’s hand in so many things.

A__ O_____ said that he learned of Christ and his love with his “pap lepel” but that he was away from the Lord for a time. While he was serving in Indonesia he heard 3 sermons in 3 years. In many ways it was through his wife that he became part of the church again. He said that being part of a close Bible study for the last 25 years has helped him to grow in his faith and that as he looks back on his life he too sees that nothing has happened by chance or apart from God’s love.

Nothing can or ever will separate you from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

That is God’s promise to us as a church. It is God’s promise to us personally. This morning we say this particularly and directly to you J_____ and to you J_____. God is and will be at work every moment of your life with his Holy Spirit to persuade you. I think what we’ve heard also tells us that as much of God’s love as we know now, there is still more waiting for us.

So that at the end of every day you can lie down and sleep, knowing that his love is with you. So that every morning you can get up and live without fear, openly, joyfully, obediently for Jesus. And so that, one day after living in the love of Jesus, you may even die, safe in the love of Jesus.

May the Lord be gracious to you.

May the Lord be gracious to me.

And all God’s people said, Amen.

John Luth

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