

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church
Sermon by Pastor A. Schultz
11th Sunday after Pentecost (series A.)

Romans 8:35-39



35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?
36 As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” **37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.** **38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,** **39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in Hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

Jesus’ love never fails! Jesus’ *forgiving love* never fails. A man named Eric Lomax died the other day. Eric was 93 years old. During World War II – when he was just 19 years old Eric joined the British Army. Some 3 years later Eric became a prisoner of war of the Imperial Army of Japan. Eric was caught by his captors with a radio receiver he had made from spare parts. But instead of killing him they tortured him again and again. They broke his bones. They poured water into his nose and mouth. One of the Japanese soldiers who took part in this torture was named Nagase Takashi. I dare say – by the time you walk out of Church today you will not remember the name **Nagase Takashi** – but Eric would never forget it. When the War ended Eric said he would happily have murdered Mr. Takashi. In fact Eric used to dream about meeting Mr. Takashi one day. Eric spent the better part of the 80s looking for information about him. Finally in 1993 they met again. Mr. Takashi had spent all the years since the war devastated by guilt over his treatment of one particular British soldier – that soldier was Eric. When they met again Mr. Takashi bowed a very formal bow. Eric had practiced when he took his hand how to say in Japanese, “Good morning, Mr. Takashi, how are you?” Mr. Takashi was trembling and crying and said again and again, “I am so sorry--so very

sorry.” There could be no sweeter words in the world than the words, “I forgive you! I forgive you!” Today God’s Word talks about that most wonderful message:

Jesus’ Forgiving Love Never Fails! Let us rejoice in it and let it overpower us

We have been reading from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans. This is the 10th of 16 weeks from Romans. This is the 4th week in a row from Romans chapter 8! Remember the last few weeks? **8v.1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus... No condemnation**—no guilt, no blame, no shame—no one saying, “It’s all your fault!” We are completely and unconditionally forgiven—by grace through faith for Jesus’ sake! **14 For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs— heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. ... 18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.** Remember? When we don’t know what to pray for or how to say it—the Holy Spirit translates even our groans into prayers that our Heavenly Father hears! Last Sunday Pastor Gartner reminded us: **28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And those he**

predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Today God's Word comforts us: ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." Paul names 7 hypotheticals – 7 possibilities! Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? **Troubles?** The Greek word here has the flavor of pressure – we might say stress! Do you know about stress? Do you have stress – pressure at school? Stress and pressure at your job? Pressure in your home – your marriage – your spouse – your children? Do you have stress and pressure – to pay the bills? Pressure from trouble sleeping – trouble with your body and doctors can't figure it out. All they know is what you *don't* have. They can't tell you what's wrong? And you are sick and tired of being sick and tired? Troubles won't separate you from Jesus' love. What about **hardship**? Hardship literally means narrowness of room. That kind of sounds like stress, too. Distress from the difficulties of life reduce us to such an extremity we don't know what to do. Serious illnesses and surgeries – operations after radiation and chemotherapy. Family troubles – children's marriages that are coming apart. Grandchildren that have learning disabilities or special needs. Financial troubles – your car doesn't start – your truck doesn't stop – your tires have no tread. Your oil or your brake fluid or your power steering fluid is all over your driveway – not in your car! **Persecution?** Literally pursuit – being chased – hounded – persecuted for your faith. Do you know what that feels like? ISIS or is it ISIL – literally persecuting Christians and Yazidis in Iraq? Do you know what Yazidis believe? The Yazidi faith is a combination of Judaism – Old Testament Scripture, plus some Islam, plus some ancient – Persian Zoroastrianism, plus some Christianity – with what we would call the heresy of Manichaeism. Manichaeism – is something we study in early Christian Church history. It's part of Gnosticism – this idea that some people have greater insight – greater understanding – greater knowledge about God – that they achieve apart from God's Word! It's unscriptural – literally and we would say simply wrong – in the light of God's Word. Yazidis embrace reincarnation and essentially reject the concepts of sin and evil so they do not believe in the devil nor hell. The Yazidis believe they are descended from Adam – but not from Eve. While they baptize believers

much like Christians, Yazidis pray while facing the sun in the morning, noon and night, offering up a total of five prayers per day. They think dark blue is extremely holy so they don't wear dark blue clothes. You can't get married in April. Brides wear red. And many Yazidis won't eat pumpkins or lettuce. Much of what they do – has to do with oral traditions – with “*we always did it that way*” – without really knowing or understanding why. Why do we do what we do and how we do it? Do we know? Or do we just keep on doing it the same way – without ever asking why? Christians and Yazidis in Iraq are being persecuted to the point of the death of the reporter from Marquette who died this week! Persecution as fierce and violent as that – cannot separate us from Jesus' forgiving love. Nor **famine**/hunger. We saw that lately too. People who because of persecution are forced to flee – leave home and literally run for their lives – don't have food or water. **Nakedness** will not separate us from Jesus' forgiving love. Again – run for your life – and you don't have time to pack a suitcase – with your socks, pants and shirts – toothbrush and shampoo and soap – medications – your jammies! Nothing will separate you from Jesus' forgiving love. Not **danger!** “Danger! Danger, Will Robinson!” There is danger in Ferguson, Missouri. Danger from looters – people throwing Molotov Cocktails, throwing bottles. People literally rioting. There is physical danger from assault to robbery, to rape – to young Amish children being snatched and abducted and molested! A **sword** – a Roman short sword – the most lethal street weapon of Paul's day – will not separate them from Jesus' forgiving love!

Paul sums it all up when he says, “³⁷ **No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.**” **More than conquerors – more than conquerors!** We have all watched football games – when time was literally down to 2 or 3 seconds – and the ball is at midfield – and we are behind by two points. And there's the snap – and the ball is down – and the kick is up – and we watch and wait – and it hits the goal post and bounces through – and the two guys with striped shirts standing by the goal posts signal it's good – and we win by 1! And everybody goes nuts and we must admit – we squeaked that one out! More than conquerors means we pound them. We hammer them! We utterly crush them – a zillion to nothing! It doesn't always look that way – especially to the enemies of the Gospel! When the Romans literally threw the *Christians* literally to the lions in the coliseum it didn't look like the

Christians were the winners. But they were. They were brought safely home to heaven where there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain. They came home triumphant to Heaven. When people in Iraq who believe in Jesus are beheaded or literally crucified – they too come home to be with Jesus forever! They are more than conquerors!

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

When I was in college I worked summers for a seed company. They grew mums and African Violets and much *much* more. There were literally acres of fields, test gardens and green houses. I would spend the summer replacing cracked and broken panes of glass – installing and repairing steam lines and water pipes. One of the growers was a little man named **Gottfried Gottlieb**. Gottfried was very short. And he walked with a painful limp. Back and forth he would rock as he walked down the little cement walkways between the treated wooden tables full of potting soil and seedlings. Gottfried got that terrible limp from WW II. Gottfried – truth be told – had been in the German Army – the Nazi Army. When the war was lost – Gottfried and his best friend surrendered to American Forces – anything to be sure they weren't prisoners of war of the Russians. Patton and the US Army were in such a rush to get to Berlin – they turned all their prisoners of war over to the Russians who literally terrorized them. Finally Gottfried and his friend said they had to try to escape – escape or die trying. They started to walk toward the latrine – as the sun was going down – then they ran as fast as they could. The Russians machine-gunned them – horrible wounded they kept running. They hid in the woods. They bled but they didn't die. They hid until the war was over – then came to America to start over! Did Gottfried hold a grudge! Did he long for revenge against the cold hard Russian soldiers that machine-gunned him in the back? I don't know! I don't think so! He told me every step was painful. And it hurt to just stand still and work, too. But he never ever said, "I curse the soldiers who did this to me!" He never ever said that. He only said, "My legs hurt!" Think of the hurt Jesus endured on the cross – to take away our sins.

Neither death nor life neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future nor any powers – neither height nor depth nor anything else in

all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in
Christ Jesus our Lord! *Amen!*

Rw. Anthony E. Schatz

