

*St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church*

*Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz*

*Romans 8:35-39 Lent 1 March 1, 2009*



**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that 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.”**

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

Did you watch the Academy Awards the other night? I almost never do. But the other night – we did. We watched a man named Kunio Kato win the Academy Award for the Best Animated Short Film. A Japanese man who drew a 12 minute – 3 second movie with a French title that means *The House In Small Cubes*. It’s the story of an old man who lives in a world flooding with water. So this little grandpa keeps building his house higher and higher – one cube on top of another – one cube at a time. Then one day he drops his pipe – and it sinks – slowly but surely to the bottom. What is he to do? He puts on a diving suit – and swims down through all his old house cubes – to the bottom. And as he does – he remembers. He remembers the past – when he was young and fell in love with his wife – and lived in the very first cube. It’s all very simple pen and ink drawings – which I love – with soft creamy brown watercolor paints – which I love. And there’s not a word that’s spoken – just very soft – very sad piano and violin music – as this very sad little grandpa remembers. This sad little grandpa – who is painfully, sadly, all alone! How sad is that? Sometimes life is very sad. That’s the painful reality. But Kunio Kato was very happy – when he accepted his Academy Award for the Best Animated Short Film. He had just 45 seconds to say thank you. And he thanked everyone. He even thanked his pencil. Imagine that – thank you pencil! At the end he said, “Domo arigato, Mr. Roboto!” Do you know what that means? It means *Domo arigato, Mr. Roboto!* It doesn’t mean anything. It’s just fun to say! Kunio Kato was happy because he won a very heavy statue. His fame lasted about 45 seconds. By the time Church is over you probably won’t remember his name. But Jesus remembers your name and mine. Our names are written in the book of life in heaven. Jesus loves you. And the Apostle Paul asks the most important question of all:

**Who Shall Separate Us From the Love of Christ?**

- 1. All the troubles of the world might try**
- 2. But Jesus’ forgiving love will never fail!**

Sometimes – on Sundays – we read through an Epistle – a letter from God to his people. Like this past Epiphany season we read 7 Sundays in a row from 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians – 5 weeks from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians and 2 weeks from 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians. Week after week – we read chapter after chapter – through those two letters. We are going to read from Romans for two weeks – then Corinthians, Ephesians and Hebrews. Romans! The theme of Romans is the same as that of the prophet Habakkuk. Do you know the common quote? **“The righteous will live by**

**faith!" The just shall live by faith!** This is the essence of the Gospel – the essential truth that we come to church week after week to hear! We are right with our Heavenly Father – by grace through faith! The first five chapters of Romans pound home the powerful truth – we are saved by grace through faith. It doesn't matter if you are Jewish – a physical descendant of Abraham – with his blood literally in your veins. God could form from the stones, rocks and creamy boulders of Israel – raise up children from Abraham. It doesn't matter if you are not a child of Abraham. You cannot say – I am not guilty of countless sins because I acted in ignorance! We are all accountable to God. With all the "hugs and kisses" that young people of confirmation age – and high school and college see on TV and in the movies they rent and see – and all the songs and videos they see – it would be fitting for parents to talk with their children about what God's Word says. It is in the first chapter of Romans that God's Word says, God intended hugs and kisses to be between one man and one woman after they are married. That hugs and kisses between men or between women is sinful and wrong – not because people are intolerant or afraid or hateful. It is wrong because God says it's wrong. Understand that. It's wrong because God's Word says it's wrong. Then comes that painful laundry list of what goes painfully wrong – in our homes – our families – our lives – if we think we can go through life ignoring God. Paul wrote, **"Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips. (Just stop and think for a moment. Envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice – gossiping! Gossip in a league with murder? How can that be? Because gossip is so destructive, so deadly – those little whispered discussions over coffee – did you hear – did you know – wait until you hear this! Gossip is not just little old ladies telling stories at the expense of their neighbor. It's men with their lunch coolers at the job site or the factory lunch room – or people in a booth at a restaurant. It's skilled professional word processors – that are whispering and e-mailing uninformed – at the expense of fellow believers and it's wrong!) Gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent – that's students talking back to their teachers – arguing with their teachers and parents – arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (It's *The Apprentice* – starting tonight – nothing personal – just business – ruthless business – doing what you need to do – cut-throat to be *The Survivor*) Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death – death – they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them! Romans 1:28f**

Jesus died on the cross – to take away all our sins – our gossip, our heartless thoughts and hurtful behavior. It is in light of that unconditional forgiveness – that we have this powerful gospel confidence--**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?** The love of Christ – the Greek work for love here – is the word you have heard – *agape*. The Greeks were very precise when they talked about love. We sort of lump all kinds of love together. We just say love – for the first person of the opposite sex – who touched our hand – and for a moment you don't know if it's an accident or on purpose – and then they squeeze your hand and they look into your eyes and then they are so close to you – you can smell their perfume – and they give you the softest kiss – and for a moment you have to tell your self to breath. And we say we love that – and we love pizza with extra cheese – and we say we love to tailgate at a Packers game – and none of those things are the same. Sometimes we love someone because they are so thoughtful and gentle and warm and kind – and we have so many things in common. And sometimes we love someone – because they have been so kind and good to us. And sometimes we love someone –

because they have helped us – and have earned our gratitude and respect. But the strange thing about God’s love is – we don’t deserve it. God doesn’t love us because we are so good. He knows all our weaknesses – all our failures and mistakes. He knows all the things that are wrong with us. And he loves us still! **Who shall separate us from this unconditional giving and forgiving love of Christ?**

**Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long: we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”** *Trouble* – is *distress, hard circumstances, suffering*. I have said before – if you think you have troubles – if you are ever tempted to think you have terrible troubles – all you have to do is look around to find *real suffering!* Go to Children’s Hospital in Milwaukee – and watch little people – literally less than 4 feet tall – pushing their IV tree on wheels down the hall – the little plastic bags of harsh chemicals drip, drip, dripping into their arms. Their little heads covered with all kinds of autographed baseball hats or scarves – dark circles under their sunken eyes – yet a smile on their face – because they are happy to see you. Go to the burn ward – where people have salve smeared all over their body to keep the oxygen from their burns – lest they cry out in unspeakable pain. Go to a Veteran’s Hospital – and see soldiers who have unspeakable wounds – from the bombs that exploded in the name of a god that doesn’t even exist! If you feel sorry for yourself – because you don’t have enough money to own a huge home – or a flat screen High Def TV – if you can’t afford to eat out – and the bottoms of your shoes are thin – and there is rust on your car and your winter coat is threadbare – spend a few minutes by the hospital – emergency room. See the broken bodies lifted from one hospital bed to another. Or spend some time at Hafemeister’s or Pederson’s or Schmutzler-Vick’s and you will see genuine suffering. It is true, **“For your sake we face death all day long: we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”** We are very breakable – and terrible things happen all the time. Airplanes literally fall out of the sky onto homes – and people who prayed, *“If I should die before I wake...”* wake up to see Jesus! If the most terrible things imaginable do happen to us – they cannot take us away from Jesus’ love!

**For I am convinced that 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.”** Paul is convinced – sure and certain – with a child like confidence that nothing will ever be able to keep him away from Jesus’ forgiving love. Neither height nor depth – nothing so good and nothing so terrible will take me away from Jesus. We watched the Academy Awards the other night. The man who won for best director was walking up to the microphone for his 45 second acceptance speech when suddenly he stopped and then hopped the last few steps up to the microphone. He said he had promised his children that if he won – he would do the Tigger thing – and jump – literally for joy – as he accepted his award. I have often thought – there are in this world – far too many Eyores and not enough Tiggers. There are far too many times when we are saying, “Oh, dear, oh me, oh my, oh no!” And not nearly enough times when we are like Tigger – filled with happiness and joy! It might be – that we have suffered terrible pain and loss. But there is a powerful confidence we have deep inside – that no matter how dark the present might be – there is in our future a joy and peace and safety and rest – that will fill us with a confidence and an optimism that not even the devil and all his evil angels can spoil. In the end we are going home to heaven – where there will be no more tears or sadness – not ever again!

**Nothing in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** Did you hear they found the fossil of a very old – very odd bird down in Peru? The head of this bird was about fifteen and a half inches long. This bird had teeth at the end of

its beak and an almost 20 foot wingspan. They think it wasn't very good at flying – although I don't know how they would know that – being as they never ever saw even one fly. Oh, I know they have all these physics formulas for working that kind of thing out. I know that. I also know – according to those formulas bumble bees wouldn't even make it off the ground – and they do. They say these birds probably chewed while they were flying. Again – I think that's kind of an assumption, too, since nobody ever saw them eating either – and so? They say this bird lived 50 million years ago but became extinct about 2.5 million years ago – because of climate change! Now that I know is completely and utterly wrong. Earth is about 6,000 years old – if you work all the birthdays back to Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden. It's very sad, I think, for people in great white lab coats – with all kinds of fancy letters after their names – to pick up bleached bones midst the rocks of the Peruvian desert coast – and make such blasphemous pronouncements about the birds our Heavenly Father made – giving all credit to chance and coincidence – instead of appreciating God's wisdom, power and wondrous goodness. This will go on perhaps for a little while longer. And then, suddenly, like a thief in the night – Jesus will be here – and will go home with him and we will be with him forever. Nothing will ever separate us from him. **Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus! Amen!**

To God alone all glory!

*Rev. Anthony L. Schultz*