

# Sermon Text for September 24, 2017

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

## *Genesis 6:1-8, Romans 8:38-39*

"Nothing can separate us from the love of God"

Had a great opportunity to go see Jonah this past week. It really was perfect timing because of today's Scripture and today's sermon. I love it, I really do enjoy all of the Sight and Sound shows. Anytime you can get thousands of people in a theater to hear the Gospel, I'm okay with that. The only thing about Jonah is that in the play he comes to a recognition of his sin and is brought back to the side of God. In the Bible, the last words we hear from Jonah are: It is better for me to die than to live, I am angry enough to die. Jonah, even at the end of the story, is still choosing to try to separate himself from God. God won't allow it, but Jonah continues to try even to the bitter end.

You know, there is a big difference between having something to say and having to say something. I hope and I pray that you know how much of a pleasure and a privilege it is for me to come before you every Sunday. The day that I feel like I have to approach Sunday as desperately having to find something to say to you is the day that this guy goes into chopping wood for a full time vocation. As preachers we are called to talk about God which is much more interesting than talking about us. And how we talk about God is interpreting and trying to understand what God's Word tells us. And part of that deciphering process is trying to figure out what is God's Word trying to tell us for today.

There is so much to talk about today but the verses we have in Romans are the type that after you read them you want to keep quiet because you don't want to say something that might take away from them. All of Romans 8 talks about the amazing grace that God has for us. A grace that reassures us that what happens to us here cannot even compare to the glory that is to come. A grace that tells us that all things work together for good for those who love God, a grace that tells us that if God is for us, who can be against us, a grace that tells us that we are more than conquerors and with God on our side we not only win but we win big.

Today, the final grace filled promise of Romans 8 and it is a bit sad to end a chapter that is so rich and full. Today we hear the most powerful NO in all of Scripture. NOthing, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**READ SCRIPTURE**

It is amazing how much this Scripture speaks by itself. I don't want to mess it up, I want it to enter and be a part of your lives just by having read it this morning. This Scripture in Romans I use in every single memorial service that I take part in. At a time in your life when you have just been painfully wrenched from someone you love, at a time when you do not want to be separated, the words come even though you may feel the separation pain and grief from your loved one, nothing, Paul says nothing can separate us from the love of God.

But think back on how hard we actually try to separate ourselves from the love of God, much like Jonah. Think back on our infidelity in God's eyes. Our Old Testament Scripture is a pretty powerful one. Do you hear what it says in verse 6 and the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. Wow, that is pretty bad. God was so angry with us that he didn't want us around so he chooses to destroy all of creation.

But this promise that we read in Romans tells us nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of God, not even a flood, not even ourselves. God always holds out a ray of hope for us. Where is that in this Scripture? Noah found favor in God's sight. God always wants to keep that personal contact with us be it either through Noah, or Abraham, or Moses, or our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. No matter how bad things get, God is going to find a way to bring us back to the fold. That is just who God is, God wants to be in relationship with us.

So often we try to unchild ourselves, we remove ourselves from the fellowship of God's family either by turning away from church, or even by completely turning our back on God and God's guidance by saying that we simply know better. Think of the dark times in your life. Do you remember them? Are you living through them? Do you remember what helped you get through them? Here is the good news that we find in these verses in Romans 8, God's grace, God's love has always had an impact upon us.

This is what Paul is talking about when he says I am convinced. Nothing wishy-washy about this statement. There is no question, I am certain, in his mind this is not an opinion, this is a fact. He's said something similar to this before. Look at verse 35, the third Who, who will separate us from the love of Christ? Neither...not even all of creation will separate us.

This is not easy for us to understand, but once we do it is so comforting. We live our lives almost in a series of attachments and bonds that eventually over time can get broken and new ones are created. We are attached to our kids, but then they go and we are separated from them. Military kids like missionary kids learn to make fast bonds because they know, soon enough they are going to be gone. We are attached to our churches, but when strife comes, a new pastor, controversial statements, personal attacks, we look elsewhere and make new bonds.

We are attached to our things. How many of you are following the saga of the Bronkema benches? It has been a struggle. First we had to figure out how to take the paint off, that took a couple of months, then we put on the wrong caulking, it turned to rubber so that had to be taken off. These things become important to us, but when you look at what is happening in Mexico, or the havoc wreaked by the storms someone from the outside could look and say: really, are you talking about benches?

But luxuries do sometimes become necessities in our eyes. They take us away. There is nothing wrong with Facebook, unless it takes you away from a time of sitting down with your family unhindered. There is nothing wrong with Fantasy Football, unless it takes you away from your family or your time with God. We don't live in a Puritanical setting, we need things which give us joy whether they are directly related to the presence of Jesus in our lives or not. But when those things which bring us joy and comfort and safety and security become more important than what Christ might want from our lives, then we are actively separating ourselves from the love of God.

What in our lives sometimes separates us from the love of Christ, or do we put in the place of our love of Christ. Does our love for our country put us in danger of making it an idol. I wonder what would happen if Isaiah were to come to the earth today as one of us, an American citizen? Isaiah called his country a harlot, a prostitute. What if Isaiah were to come and instead of kneeling for the national anthem actually spoke out during the anthem and called America a whore. It is shocking to think of it, isn't it? Even Jesus, when he arrives at Jerusalem, the city of God, the nation that God had chosen to be His people, he weeps over them and demands that they not kill those whom God has placed in their midst. God will not allow us to be separated from him, even if we align ourselves and give our primary devotion to America so that it would succeed even if it succeeds by not following God's mandates of love your neighbor.

Friday I went to a gala to celebrate the 30 years that CWS has been in existence. Did you know that the BBC called Lancaster the refuge capital of America. Just right down the road from us we live in a place that is the epicenter of the debate on immigration and refugees. I didn't know a single person at that gala. I didn't see a single pastor there, and I thought for a second, I probably don't belong here with the mayor and council members. What does this have to do with the Gospel message? But then I am reminded of the dozens of times that Jesus teaches us who our neighbor is. Sometimes the messages we hear teach us something different about our neighbor, it teaches us to run from them, to separate ourselves from them. When we do that, we run away from God's mandate to love our neighbor. Maybe the opposite of danger is

love and not courage.

What keeps us away from God? What separates us from God? Fear. In the Good Samaritan story so much time is given in the Gospel to the Good Samaritan the good that he did and so little time is given to the robbers and the bad that they did. But we spend most of our time worrying about how to prevent the bad that we miss out on doing the good. This separates us from God

In our family relationships we enter marriage with the understanding that only death will do us apart. Wouldn't it be nice if Paul said, I am certain that neither death, nor infidelity, nor boredom, nor etc. will separate you from each other. But that is not the case. Our human relationships, especially our marriage relationships take time, take effort, take work and at times we don't seem to have the energy for it, but I am convinced that they are worth it. When I was in Prague I wrote letters to Stacy every single day. I couldn't bear to be separated from her. She came and visited me for a few week at the end of my time there and I wanted to know, so, did you like my letters? Yes, the ones I could read. I had a hard time reading them. When I got back to the states I looked at them and they were unintelligible. I don't have the best handwriting.

Once you have tasted the love of God, you never ever want to lose it. You can't bear to be separated from it. But the most compelling part of the story is that God cannot bear to be separated from you.

Amen.