

God Is Here

I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor 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.

That's one of the best known passages from Paul's Letter to the Romans-

It's one of the scriptures most often read at funerals. It says who God is.

Kathy Grieb, who teaches at Virginia Seminary, wrote a book about the book of Romans-
The Story of Romans.

I think she was my most favorite professor at VTS:- besides being a lawyer

and an ordained priest, a seminary professor and one of the most brilliant people

I've ever met, she could sing every song the Beatles ever recorded—

and would do so at the slightest provocation.

Kathy points out that the overall theme of the Letter to the Romans is

the covenant faithfulness of God in Christ - and that this section sums up that argument.

This section frames the issues of suffering and hope raised earlier in the letter (Ch 5) ¹

Suffering and hope are simply a part of life. —

We get sick! We're in accidents! We lose jobs.

We mourn the loss of loved ones- we suffer because of their loss-

even though we always knew it would happen one day.

¹ A. Katherine Grieb. *The Story of Romans*.2002. p81

I read a sermon by Pittman McGehee on this lesson the other day,
thinking that perhaps a man of such brilliance and insight
might have a different approach.

He didn't- His sermon was about the sudden death of his father
and how he happened upon a poem that day that he regarded as a gift from God²-
It was a sign to him that he had not been separated from the love of God.
He said the poem was "some bread crumbs God had sent"
to help to satisfy his spiritual hunger.

That's what we want, isn't it! We want God to send us some bread crumbs –
- to feed our spirits- to let us know we're connected to God-
- that those we love are connected to God.

We all know the suffering of loss at some points in our lives- it's a part of life.

Funerals aren't the only times we need to hear what Paul says-

The issues he lists seem to surround us – and especially at this moment-
violence in cities- violent responses within cities;
the kovid virus which comes and comes back again-
an economy that is uncertain at best-
too many people still out of work.

We think-"How wonderful it would be not to have to endure hard times"-

How we'd love to find a way to just skip over those times

We want to hear good news.

² Pittman McGehee. *Words Made Flesh*. P283.

But, you know- I'm not sure you can get to the good news

without living through some of the hard news.

As I reflected on Pittman's story I thought about my own story

and why I started this sermon on Romans instead of talking about today's gospel

(from Matthew with all those parables.

(Jesus, in Matthew, begins by saying "The kingdom of heaven is like ...

a mustard seed...treasure in a field... yeast."))

My own story - experience – of this scripture from Romans happened like this:

My husband died a number of years ago after developing a tumor inside his heart-

There was surgery, intense chemotherapy , many hospitalizations-

an up and down battle in which the tumor did not respond to any therapy.

It was nightmarish- except -that there were things that happened along the way

that were precious-

When you're in the middle of an intense experience,

you're forced to concentrate on the present-

just to do those things necessary to get through the moment –

And when you do that, you to notice the small things-

things you'd probably miss if you were in the middle of your "pre-tragedy" life-

You're sitting outside for a moment trying not to cry –

and out of nowhere, a bird comes along and sings to you for awhile,..

You're taking your very ill partner to the hospital for chemo-

and you know he's not strong enough to make it to the building entrance-

and a parking place opens for you right in front of the entrance-

and you begin to realize it happens, not once-

but every time you take him there. – and on- and on.

And you realize you're not alone! You haven't been deserted.

As I sat in the pew with my family at Blair's funeral-

I heard this passage from Romans read-

And I thought "It's really true!- nothing can separate us from the love of God-

not the cancer- not the chemotherapy- not the uncertainty-

and not even death- can do that"!

I think it's appropriate for us now- to hear those word again-

and just put into that list... whatever is happening to you right now

that worries- frightens you- that makes you feel separated from God-

***I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present,
nor things to come, nor powers, nor 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.***

It's really true!

Amen