

Nothing Can Separate Us

Romans 8:31-39

Revelation 7:9-17

Nov 1, 2020

Rev. Donna Vuilleumier

Romans 8:31-39

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted 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, 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.

Revelation 7:9-17

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

I look at the moon and I imagine my mother looking at it too. We can see the same moon, but we can't see each other.

This painful, tender emotional, yet brief sentiment of Kunta Kinte in Alex Haley's mini-series *Roots*, to me, has always summed up the emptiness, the ache, of wanting to reach for someone, something, who is no longer there. Kunta Kinte was kidnapped and enslaved, ripped away from his family, and his home. The only tie he was left was to look up at the moon at night and wonder if his mother was also looking at the moon too. Could they see the moon together even if they could not see each other? It was a simple, beautiful, hope that in the midst of all that he had lost, he still had this one thing to keep them connected.

What is it that keeps us connected when we are lost, when we ache, for those who cannot be with us, when we have lost some one, some thing, that has us reaching out, reaching heavenward, for even a tiny connection. Kunta Kinte held on to the hope and belief that even slavery half a world away could not truly separate him from the love of his family. His belief was reflected in the moon; our hope and belief are reflected in the knowledge that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God. Whatever separations, distances, losses, hurdles, changes, problems, or concerns arise, nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God.

On All Saints Day we traditionally honor the memories of all those who have gone before us as teachers, pioneers, exemplars of the faith. We think back to the earliest Christian leaders and onto those who once worshipped with us, who were a part of our lives, our faith journey, who shared in the bread and cup with us, and now live on in our memory. It is a day that we are indeed renewed and encouraged by the knowledge that nothing ‘will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.’

These words are especially comforting this year when we are separated from family and friends, classmates and co-workers, and we are not able to live our lives in so many ways that are familiar, traditional, fun, special, comfortable and routine. This All Saints Day we are separated from the living as well as those who have passed away. The political and social justice tensions of these times add to our emotional and spiritual separations as well. We are separated in so many ways as even our worship gathering has us scattered yet together.

Tonight, I invite you to look up to the moon, and to think of who else may also be looking at the moon. Who are you separated from that may also be looking at the moon and thinking of you?

It’s an encouraging, hopeful image, isn’t it? It’s a tangible image that nothing can separate us from God’s love.

Paul overflows with emotion and emphasis. If God is for us, who is against us?... Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ...For 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. He presents a complete and painful litany of hardships, acknowledging that people have always faced a range of perils, yet God’s love remains absolute.

He offers the Romans---and us-- good news as he reassures them that by living out their callings as followers of Jesus, they have the assurance that God is at work for good in the midst of all that happens. At the same time they are being conformed to the image of Jesus, so that they will be glorified, rewarded by the gift of eternal life. Knowing that nothing can separate them from God’s love is a joy, a comfort, for today, and a foretaste of life to come.

All those who came before us, all those who once were with us, had their own experiences, their own concerns, were sustained by hope, and the presence of God, the love of Jesus Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Having been conformed to the image of Jesus, they have been glorified, rewarded by the gift of eternal life, where they hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun does not strike them, nor any scorching heat; and the Lamb at the center of the throne is their shepherd. God has wiped away every tear from their eyes.

As we remember them all today, and God's abiding presence with them, and with us, we can hear Paul's words for us as well. If God is for us, who is against us?... Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will a pandemic, or leadership that denies science and doctors, or xenophobia, or racial prejudice? No, nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God. That is indeed good news, just as is our hope for the future as joining those who have come by faith through great ordeals; a faith that goes back with us to the baptismal font when by water and the Holy Spirit we were united to Christ in his ministry, receiving the outward and visible sign of the grace of God.

Professor Israel Kamudzandu* reminds us that "Revelation calls Christians to remember that they are not sealed or baptized from challenges of life but rather we are made ready to go through whatever comes against us in our faith journey. In other words, baptism does not exempt us from sickness, betrayals, wars and other calamities but our participation in it signals God's presence in and around our lives through and beyond this life."

On this day on which we remember all those who have gone before us, those who shared in the waters of baptism and remembered Jesus Christ in the bread and the cup, and when we think of those baptized siblings in faith who are also remembering Jesus Christ with the bread and the cup in their own safe homes this morning, let us look at the at the Communion table and imagine each other looking at it too. We can see the same Communion table, even though we can't see each other, a tangible reminder that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. Amen.

* http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2815