

In Nomine Jesu

13th Sunday a. Pentecost

August 17, 2008

Hecla

Text: Romans 8:35-39 - *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written:*

“For Your sake we are killed all day long;

We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Theme: OUR CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST

- *Undefeatable*

- *Inseparable*

Dear fellow victors in the love of Christ, fellow redeemed,

Do you “hope” you’ll go to heaven or do you *HAVE* hope that you’ll go to heaven? There is a big difference between the two. A year or so before arriving in Hecla, I went out to eat at a Lebanese restaurant with a couple from the congregation. During the dinner the husband struck up a conversation with the waitress where we learned she was a Christian. To which the husband replied something to the effect of, “Isn’t it wonderful to know that whatever adversities happen to us in our life, we know we’re going to heaven?” At this the waitress replied, “Well, I hope I’m going to heaven.” The way she used that word “hope” we were pretty sure she was not talking about that certain hope which Scripture speaks of. The way in which she said it left us to think that she hoped she was going to heaven, just like she hoped a package was coming in the mail tomorrow. By no means a certain hope, but rather uncertainty that heaven would be her eternal destination.

This eighth chapter of Romans is one of those great chapters in which the Lord wishes to reassure the Christian. We heard some of the precious promises of this chapter in our New Testament reading. Like Romans 8:1 - *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”* Or Romans 8:28 - *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”* And Romans 8:31 - *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* Romans 8 then concludes with a joyous hymn of praise - a hymn which we have for our text this morning.

The believer in Christ faces pressure from every direction to deny Christ. Ever since the fall into sin, believers in the one, true God have faced adversity and persecution. Abel was killed by his brother Cain. Many of God’s prophets were killed, simply because they spoke the Word of God. Stephen was stoned to death for preaching the truth of God’s Word. The Apostles James, Peter, and Paul were killed because they followed and preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The devil thinks that if our lives are in jeopardy, then we will deny the faith and deny our Lord. But the Lord wants us to be confident. And so in the Lord gave these words of

Romans 8 to build up our confidence in Him and in our eternal future. Let us therefore examine “Our Confidence in Christ.” Confidence that in Christ we cannot be defeated and we cannot be separated from His love. May the Holy Spirit increase our confidence by His Word!

UNDEFEATABLE

“8 for 8 in ‘08.” If you have been following the Olympics this week, you have probably seen some pretty amazing things. The top story is the United States super-swimmer, Michael Phelps. He tied and then broke the thirty-six year old record of Mark Spits for the most gold medals won at one Olympic game - winning his eighth gold medal last night. Not only that but in every competition he swam in he broke a record - seven World Records and one Olympic Record. Michael Phelps was undefeated in every competition he entered - whether it was by two seconds or one one-hundredth of a second. No one was better or faster than he was in the pool.

On the other hand then there is the USA Basketball team. At one time team USA Basketball was viewed as a team that could not be defeated, because of all the superior NBA stars playing on the team. That was until 2002. Then other national teams began to beat team USA and as a result this team has not won a major championship in 8 years. Will team USA once again show it superior basketball skills remaining undefeated and winning the gold medal?

Some day Michael Phelps will lose a swimming competition. He will get older and slower. He will not remain undefeated forever. But imagine for a moment, what life would be like knowing you could never be defeated. Regardless of the competition and the opponent - you could never be defeated. No one could ever defeat you physically. No one could ever defeat you mentally. Would there be anything that you would be afraid of? Would there be any reason to be insecure about yourself in any situation, knowing that no one could defeat ?

What about your faith life? Do you feel that nothing can defeat you from getting to heaven? Or are you like that waitress that said she “hoped” she was going to heaven?

Before we go any further, we must stop here and make something very clear. Our theme for today is, “Our Confidence IN CHRIST.” In our text for today we find the words “through Him” and “in Christ” which point to the one IN WHOM we place our faith and our hope. This is a very important point, one that we need to be crystal clear on - if we are to be confident that we are going to heaven, this confidence can be found ONLY in Christ. Take Christ out of the equation and there is no confidence - only uncertainty and false hope.

The devil is a very real, very dangerous enemy. Even Adam and Eve who were holy and without sin were led into temptation by the devil and sinned against God. It is the devil’s desire to get all believers to reject Jesus and reject the faith. The devil will do all he can to get us to curse God. Take, for instance, Job. How did the devil attack Job to get him to curse God? The devil attacked Job’s family and earthly possessions. The devil then attacked Job physically with sores all over his body. All to get Job to reject God.

The devil has the world at his fingertips as he tries to pressure us into disobeying God and denying our faith. In our text Paul gives a brief summary of the various different things that Christians *have* faced and *will* face because of their faith. The pressure of tribulations, the hopeless feeling of distress, the pain of persecution, the hunger of famine, the embarrassment of nakedness, the pain of peril and sword. Christians have faced all these things as forms of persecution. We too may have to face some of these things. The old evil foe thinks that by threatening our bodily welfare, we will get frustrated and turn from Christ.

As a wolf drools at the sight sheep whom he views as an easy kill, so too the world counts

believers in Christ as easy prey and does not place much value on their lives - *as sheep for slaughter*, Paul calls us. Because of Christ, believers *are killed all day long*. Believers face the threat of death around every corner because of Jesus. And Jesus told us to expect these things. In John 15 Jesus tells all His followers, ***“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you... ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.”*** (vv. 18,20)

So should we live in fear? Should we keep silent about our faith, lest an enemy of Christ find out and make fun of us or hurt us? Or maybe we should just reject Jesus and live our lives on this world in peace. ***“In the world you will have tribulation;”*** Jesus says, ***“but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”*** (John 16:33) Jesus has overcome the world. By rising from the dead, Jesus showed that nothing could conquer Him - not even the greatest enemy of death. Jesus then ascended into heaven and now everything is under his feet. Jesus has overcome the world. His resurrection means life for all who follow Him.

Paul triumphantly proclaims that in Christ we are undefeatable. Even though the world and the devil think of our lives as worthless, just as they did of Jesus, ***“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”*** In all these things, these tribulations, distresses, persecutions, famines, nakedness, peril or sword - in all these things we are “super-victors” through Him who loved us. Without Christ we are easily defeated. And Jesus Christ knew how easily we could be defeated and so in His love He defeated our enemies for us. And now through Christ we cannot be defeated. This is the confidence we have in Christ.

INSEPARABLE

Now Paul asks the question, ***“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”*** If the love of Christ was so great that He was willing to shed His blood and die for us, who could ever separate us from that love? The way Paul asks the question we expect an answer of “NO ONE.” This is the confidence that is ours in Christ. ***For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*** Nothing. No matter how great or how powerful the opposition may seem - NOTHING is so powerful as to tear us away from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Not even that greatest of threats - death itself - can separate us from that love.

Yet, how many times haven't we wondered? How many times haven't we doubted? What is it that causes us to doubt? Isn't it always our sin and our guilt? We feel that maybe we've done something so awful, so terrible that we don't deserve heaven. Well, as far as WE are concerned, we're right. We don't deserve heaven. As sinners who have disobeyed God's will, justice requires that He punish us for our sin and our conscience tells us that.

But in these times of doubt and uncertainty we must flee to the love of Christ. No where do we see the love of Christ more clearly than on the cross. We see just how great God's love and Jesus' love was for us. So great was Jesus' love that He was willing to take all of our sins - great and small - upon Himself and suffer for those sins. So great was the love Christ had for us that He suffered God's wrath in our place. When He said “It is finished” He meant it. There was nothing left to suffer - He had suffered all for us. Then we need to journey to the tomb where the body of Jesus was laid. Is the dead body of Jesus still in that tomb? NO! Jesus lives! He was raised again for our justification. God raising Jesus from the dead was an announcement to the world and all enemies of God. God announced that He accepted Jesus' payment for our sins by

raising Him from the dead.

THIS IS THE LOVE OF GOD! THIS IS THE LOVE OF CHRIST! The God who did not spare His only begotten Son, but delivered Him up for us all - for my sins - for your sins - will not the same God who did that, then freely give us all things? If God is for us, who can be against us? What do we have to fear? What do we have to be afraid of? What can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord? **NOTHING!!!** Even in death we go to be with our Lord eternally in heaven. Inseparable in Christ.

This is our confidence in Christ. No foe is so powerful, no threat is so great, no trial, no tribulation can ever defeat us in Christ - because Christ is greater than them all. There is no need to doubt or feel insecure about our eternal future in Christ. In Christ we are safe and secure, nothing can separate us from God's love. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus! God be praised for His great love! **AMEN.**