

Remembrance Sunday, November 10th 2019.

Romans 8:31-39.

Corrie Ten Boom, was a Dutch Christian, sent to Ravensbruck concentration camp, with her sister during the Second World War. Corrie was released from the camp. Betsie died while they were both in the camp. After the war, she became a well known speaker, writer, evangelist. She was good friends with Brother Andrew - founder of Open Doors.

Brother Andrew tells how, after Corrie had travelled the world telling people her story and challenging people to follow Jesus, she came home to 'retire'. Retirement for Corrie ten Boom was just another chapter of activity - like Moses only really gets going after he is 80! Corrie bought a house in Haarlem just a few kilometres from where her family used to live and hide Jews. It was the first home she had owned. Brother Andrew visited her one day and he admired her comfortable furnishings, the magnificent family clocks that her father had repaired, and the beautiful garden. Pointing to her garden, Brother Andrew casually remarked: "Corrie, God is good to you."

Brother Andrew shares, Corrie quickly and forcefully replied, God was also good when Betsie died. God is always good." No matter how awful things were for Corrie, for others during the times of war, she held to the view he remained good.



*Corrie ten Boom (1892-1983)*

Paul has a similar shout in his closing words of Chapter 8 in Romans. It is a confession of faith and hope, with no hesitation and no qualification. His confidence is in God, in the final triumph of God's purpose regardless of the evil he sees, the violence, the wars, the human injustice and suffering. When I was working in England, we were running the Alpha Course, and on our noticeboard, we had a poster which said : The meaning of life is..." and the rest of the poster was left blank for people to think about it. Someone filled in his or her answer. Once in faded pen and then darker pen a week or two later. They wrote: "The meaning of life is persecution." Can you imagine what pain that person was facing? We are being encouraged in Romans, nothing-not personal persecution, human weakness, not demonic power or sin, not death itself - can defeat God or prevent that final triumph.

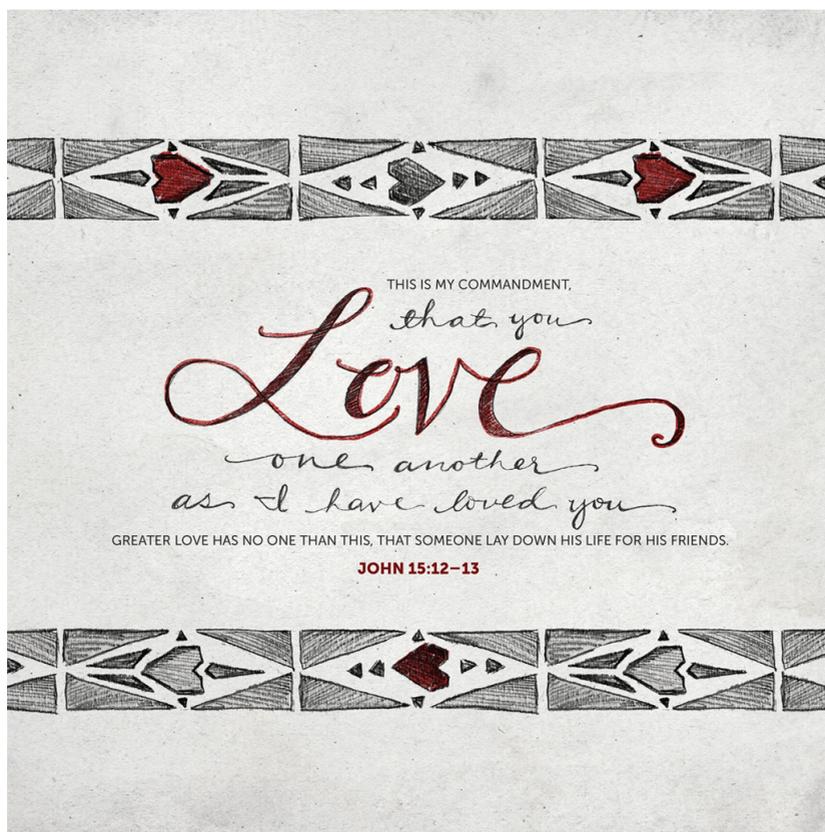
'If God is for us, who can be against us' he says. When he says 'if' it doesn't mean he doubts. The verse could have been written - 'Since God is for us' and that would be a good title in our bibles for all that comes next.

He says to believers in Rome, people like us, who face human struggles, challenges due to being Christian, and problems that came with living in a sinful damaged society and a fallen creation, he says that they and we can have confidence.

"What, then shall we say in response to this?' It is reminder to look back at all of the chapter 8 and what he has been teaching. He has reminded them of the Spirit in our lives. The Holy Spirit - also called the Spirit of Christ - who speaks and reassures our spirits that we are children of God, the one who prays when we don't know what to pray, the one who comforts, builds up, strengthens and quietly transforms us more into the one we are choosing and seeking to follow.

He reminds them secondly of what God has already done for his people. He gave his son to death. Eucharist is that dramatic act, we remember and give thanks. This Remembrance Sunday, across many churches in Europe, people are remembering those who gave their lives in sacrifice to bring freedom to this and other countries. Jolanda when we were in Telford, wanted to, on a Remembrance Sunday service to say thank you to the British people gathered in our small church - many of whom were in their 60s - because their fathers, uncles, mothers had gone to war, to help bring freedom to the Netherlands. Someone to thank them from a country - the Netherlands - which had been liberated. This year was both 75 years since the D Day landings in Normandy and the American, British and Polish airborne landings in Eindhoven, Nijmegen and Arnhem. I saw a video interview with an elderly lady, who as a school child, just after the war, her and

others began laying flowers on the airborne graves. In remembrance. In thanksgiving for their sacrifice. Paul says we remember what has been done for us. We remember sacrifice. The Son given to death. Paul's words echo one of the most famous events in Israel's history - Abraham's offering of Isaac in sacrifice. That totally committed display by Abraham, in his readiness to sacrifice his son - a mirror of God's commitment to us - by giving his son - proof he is good and loving because of the cross.



Our confidence needs to include what happens at the final judgement of all humanity. But our assurance, for when that final

judgement comes, is rooted in what God has already done in Christ - our assurance remains firm. Christ offered as an offering for our sin, the sin of the world. It assures us that God can both be just and holy - sin, evil, cruelty committed in war and at other times - matters to him, he is the one who judges sin. And *he* is the one who justifies, who reconciles us to himself. When the One who brings about the justification of the ungodly is on the great throne then what other charge can be brought against those he has called? When Christ is the advocate - the one who speaks out on behalf of guilty humanity - then no prosecutor has a chance.

Then he comes to perhaps some of his most famous words, most precious to so many people. We have God's protective love with us, for us, until the consummation of God's triumph. Who will separate us from the love of Christ Paul asks?

But why would he need to write these words to them. I mean they would know God loves them, right? I mean we all know that don't we? Right? Well, no at times we don't, we don't feel it or we question it. We get to points in life where we may ask does God really love us? It can be the way life keeps turning out. We give God priority - give to God what is God's as Jesus says - we seek to live a life as he plans and reveals in his bible and yet hassles, difficulties, hard times keep coming. A few years ago, I had a chat with a person on the phone, who told me her Mum, in the 1960s, was one of the British Olympic Hockey team. Yet when she learned that some matches would be on a Sunday, she believed that scripture taught her to have Sunday as a rest day and so out of respect to her team mates, so she wouldn't be picking and choosing which games to play in, she turned down the chance to go the Olympics. Hassles and hard choices caused by being a Christian. God do you love me?

The list of hardships Paul shares were all too real to the Christians in Rome, and across our world, there are believers facing these still. Believers facing trouble, anguish (inner strain and stress) or persecution for following Jesus. Those who experience food shortages, famine (as many believers did in the Netherlands in the winter of 1944-45), those faced actual danger due to war or travel or work, those who were imprisoned or homeless.

He quotes Psalm 44 - *"for your sake we face death all day long, we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."* As if many believers have the face of death before them every day. An experience that would later be fulfilled in Emperor Nero's time some years later. But Paul knows - he looks us in the eye - despite all that faces us, all that we go through, went through or are about to walk through - he urges us to have an, you could call it, an outrageous, assurance - "no in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." 'We always struggle and yet we always emerge' (cf Calvin, Romans 8, pg188). We could ask, does Paul really know what life is like? But he is not some theologian or pastor locked in an academic tower in Antioch or Jerusalem. He understood. We just have to listen to 2 Cor 11:23-27

He shares he has been in prison, flogged, face death. then shares

*"24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone*

*without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked."*

This was no detached hope. His confidence in God was long tested and proved in experience. I was not cut off from God's love when I was in danger, he remained good, when I was in the open seas, I was not cut off from love when I was beaten...

His final words are incredible. One of the outstanding statements of faith.

*38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 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.*

Careful deliberate affirmed in heart and mind. Nothing but nothing can separate you, me, anyone from God's love in Christ. He focuses on Christ, not to exclude any other expression of God's love, but affirms in Christ, we have found no greater expression of God's love than that demonstrated through Jesus. It is so encompassing - all we can face or come across. He begins with death - the great enemy - which has a say in peoples lives. Yet its power to separate from God has gone - due to Christ - we do not grieve as people without hope Paul says. We grieve with hope. General Montgomery, army commander, before the key battle of El Alamein in Egypt in 1942, told his troops to read these verses before the battle would begin. As a Christian and as a general he would invite his troops to pray before each battle. In recommending these words, he knew his troops would face many of the situations Paul describes. Yet even in that, Montgomery held to that nothing could separate from the love of God.

In these words, Paul encourages us, should anything in life or even death seem able to tear us away from God, his goodness and love, it will not do so.

He says even if the angels could intervene wrongly in our lives, they would not cut us off.

Even things present or the future, no length of time can cut us off from the grace of the Lord. His words are so helpful - we can struggle with the sorrow from the experiences we go through now, but we can have fear or anxiety about what is coming.

He shares a list of experiences which people can face - trouble, calamity, being persecuted, hunger, destitute, in danger, threatened with death, death of those around us, things in life, spiritual powers, fears about today, worries about tomorrow - and he says none of these can stop God loving you or cut you or us off from God's love. Confidence. You could say, to put it in other language. "I take you to have and to hold, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish..." well known marriage vows, made by people who say nothing will stop their love or cut off their love from their partner. Can you imagine God saying these to you?

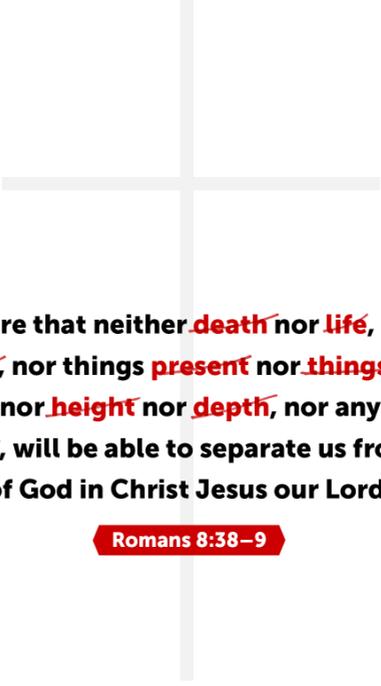
Or a second image. Is that of our children. No matter what they do. We will always love them. So if they don't actually achieve our hopes for their lives, we will love them. If they don't become our image of what we hoped when they were in the womb or in the play pen. If they mess up their lives, really mess them up. and get us annoyed - to say the least - we will love them. If disaster and horrible things happen and they really need to lean on us, we will love them. Can you imagine God loving you in such a way?

He does.

Paul says, Not because of who you are, But because of what he has done - in and through his Son; Not because of what you've done, But because of who *He* is, His totally committed love to you.

*38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 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.*

Amen.



**For I am sure 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.**

**Romans 8:38-9**