

## Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> July 2023; Benefice HC Stonegrave

The word ‘separation’ generally brings to mind negative a connotation; we often hear it referring to the breakup of a relationship or marriage, the consequences of a tragic event, where families are separated such as war or famine or climate catastrophe. Then of course we hear of death separating us from our loved ones. The word means, ‘the action or state of moving or being moved apart.’ The best example of this is probably the church itself, catholic, universal, believing in the same God but with a long history of separations over the last two thousand years into thousands of denominations, sects, and groups. The separation continues causing further division and disunity caused by prejudice, bigotry, racism, sexism, malice and jealousy. We are all culpable. This division is diabolical, because it separates us from our brothers and sister in Christ to whom we should reach out to in God’s love no matter how diverse they might seem. We are one body, Jesus prayed for us to be one.

The greatest tragedy of course, is human kind being separated from its true relationship with a loving God, a condition we refer to as ‘sin’, which culminates in death. Because of mankind’s decision to separate from God as described in the Book of Genesis, the prospect of eternal separation was the inevitable outcome, until God intervened and rescued the situation and offered a means of reconnecting and healing the separation for ever. This was salvation given to us in Jesus Christ.

Our Epistle today from St Paul’s letter to the Romans reading includes some of the most familiar and comforting words we have in Scripture. The final paragraph states emphatically that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nothing can separate us...nothing can move us apart from that. God has healed the great separation and has not abandoned “us,” and is in fact working-across the past, present, and future-on our behalf.

What’s more, because of God’s faithfulness in raising Jesus from the dead, both the present experience of suffering and what we can expect of the future are transformed. We not only know God’s solidarity with us now but also anticipate a time when even the worst that the powers of sin and death have to offer will be shown to be a “slight momentary affliction” when compared with the “glory

about to be revealed to us”.

‘That’s easy for you to say, you might argue, what do you know about suffering?’ I know in the suffering on the cross, the death and resurrection of Jesus, we see the solidarity of God revealed with humanity and the rest of creation, which brings the future hope.

Without the future hope, God’s present involvement in the lives of the suffering might amount to little more than a feeble expression of the company that misery loves. But the reality is, that together, the actions of God—past, present, and future—on our behalf testify to a fierce, compassionate love from which nothing in all creation can separate us.

St. Paul also adds that the past tells the same story of God’s intention for Christ to be “firstborn within a large family” (8:29), a family that includes us. The word translated here as “predestined” appears rarely in the New Testament. Once it is in Acts, Romans, and 1 Corinthians, and twice it is in Ephesians. In Acts and 1 Corinthians, it refers to the events of Christ’s death and resurrection, testifying that they unfolded according to God’s plan. In Ephesians and Romans, the word describes the Gentiles’ eventual inclusion among the people of God as having been planned. In both cases, the text points to God always having had something beyond wrath in mind for sinners and the decaying creation of which they (and we) are a part. He always intended to heal the separation, not maintain it because the Holy Spirit who searches our hearts, makes intercession to God and bridges the gap of separation.

To close I will read a modern version of our passage from Romans, words to carry with us especially when we feel that separation, the world tries to create but through faith, and hopeful hearts will not overcome us.

Because God loves us, none of these troubles can ever beat us. He makes us win against them. I am sure of this. Nothing can stop God from loving us. Death cannot do that. Life cannot do that. Angels cannot do that, nor can demons do that. Nothing that happens to us now, or that will happen in a future time can do that. No powerful spirits can do that. Nothing that is high above the world can do that, nor anything that is deep down below the ground. Nothing else in the whole universe can stop God from loving us. Because of our Lord Christ Jesus, we know how much God loves us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.