

LOCK DOWN DAY 132 – 5 AUGUST 2020

Molweni dear family and friends of False Bay Diocese,

Scripture: Romans 8:35, 37-39; Matthew 14:13-21 Hymn: *Love divine, all loves excelling*

In today's reading from St Paul's letter to the Romans, we have one of the most important verses in the entire Bible : 'Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ'. Unfortunately, many people interpret St Paul's use of the word '**love**' here in a way that Paul does not mean. **Love** for God is not something to be **done**, a **task to** achieve or an **achievement** to be strived for. Paul does not mean that we must **strive** for love of God and not allow any trials, persecution or threat to shake our lives. That understanding is not correct. What Paul is saying, is something entirely different. **Nothing** in existence can ever **separate** us from the **love** that God has for **us** . If we have the false interpretation that we must **show our love** for God **and** don't get me wrong here, of course we must show our love for God but if we interpret the passage of Paul **in only** that way, then we miss the boat because we focus solely **on our** attitudes and our desires and this fosters one of the most persistent mistakes made about our faith. Christian faith is not primarily about something **we do** for God. **It is about what God does for and in us**. It is not so much an amount of **human aspiration** as it is a **revelation of divine desire**, a **revelation** of the **will of God** and the **nature of God**.

In chapter 8 of Romans, Paul rises to great heights of eloquence. It is almost a hymn of triumph. He uses the word '**separate**'...**who** will **separate** us from the **love** of Christ. Not **what** will separate us. The word **separate** used by Paul is directly related to divorce, a marriage partner who **vacates the relationship** in soul or body to leave a marriage. This is what is in the mind of St Paul here. Nothing can **divorce us, separate us** from the love of God because **the covenant with God** is a **marriage relationship** between God and God's people.

Prophet Hosea in the Old Testament expresses beautifully this **concept** of a covenant being a relationship, a marriage, between God and God's people. Paul uses the word **separate** as to **separate in a divorce case**. It means to vacate a space. God and humanity are **united** in a bond that **nothing** can **separate**. What God has joined together let no one **put asunder** or **separate**. If we **vacate** God, God will not **vacate** us. That **space for God**, which is created **for God by God in us**, is a space that has to be occupied by God, by **love** and nothing can **separate** us from that **love**.

Then, what is interesting here, is that Paul speaks about **seven** things which can **never separate** us from the love of Christ ...tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword. Tribulation or hardship, is something that hems us in and causes **internal** pressure. Something that causes us to feel confined, restricted, without options. It carries with it the **internal pressure** of this **tribulation**, especially when there is a feeling that there is no way of escape. It is an **internal struggle**. Then Paul gives us the word **distress** but it is **external**. Then he uses the word **persecution**. In Greek, the word persecution means to hunt or to bring someone down like an animal. Trying to suppress or punish someone because of their convictions. **Famine, nakedness**, lack of food, clothing. **Danger**, any kind of peril. Then Paul speaks about the **sword**. The word he uses here is a dagger really, a short dagger mainly used for stabbing. So Paul uses these **seven** forms of suffering as kind of 'quasi' personal powers because they are earthly manifestations of the cosmic powers which Paul goes on to numerate in the second part of the text. **Ten** of them: death, life, angels, rulers, things present, things to come, powers, height, depth, anything else in all creation. These cosmic manifestations can never **separate** us from God and the **love** of God.

For Paul, **love** is not an abstract quality but an event that happened, mainly **the cross**. **The cross** was the **obedience** of the Son and at the **same time** the **redemptive act** of the Father. So, in this passage, Paul is interpreting the death of Jesus as the victory over the demonic powers who can do no ultimate damage to believers. Paul is not saying that believers **are immune** to the onslaughts of these powers but amid all onslaughts, the believers are super conquerors .

This totality and boundlessness of the **love** of God, that nothing can **separate** us from, is expressed beautifully in today's gospel story where the feeding of the people is in a **lonely** place. Matthew tells us that Jesus, the disciples and the people are in a **lonely** place which should be **translated** as a **desert, solitary, desolate place**. It is an **adjective** that means **deserted, desolate, waste**. Very often it is translated as **desert** in the Old Testament. It is also ironically where God **richly grants** his **presence and vision** for those seeking him. The **limitless love** of God shows itself strong in **the limiting** scenes of life that we have to go through, like Covid-19.

The **lonely** place today is a symbol of a person's heart **divorced**, or as Paul would say **separated** from the **love** of God, **not by** God but by our own sinfulness, our own **unwillingness** to be with God. So, Jesus speaks to the people in the **desolation of their lives without God** and what does God do? God **feeds them in that desolation, isolation, wasteland, lonely place**. Jesus' heart of **love** moves him to **compassion**. When the disciples wanted to dismiss the crowds to search for food, Jesus told his followers to **offer their own food, freely**. This shows the **mystery of the unlimited, bounty of God** whether it makes sense to us or not.

God invites to the banquet of the pure **water**, which is **grace** flowing from the throne of God and **food**, the Eucharist giving us the strength to go through the **desert** of this life until we reach the **promised land**. What Jesus is saying in the gospel story about feeding the people in the lonely place, the desolate place, is that **only Jesus** can satisfy the longing of the human soul, the human spirit and he does this through the **love** he poured out on the cross, which Paul tells us is the greatest power in the universe because nothing can **separate** us from that **love**.

This is the great **mystery** of God. A mystery that sometimes does not make sense to us but it is the way God works. It is God's way of **loving** and we need to **bow** down before that mystery. Yes, St Augustine was right when he said: 'Our hearts are restless O Lord until they rest in you.'

Today, please **reach out** to any couple whose Marriage Service you attended.

Prayers

We come now to the Lord who satisfies the deepest longing of our hearts. We come to the Lord with our prayers and petitions. We pray for all those who doubt the presence of God in their lives. We pray that the Holy Spirit will open their hearts to receive the abundance of God's love. *Lord hear us. Lord graciously hear us.* We pray for the church throughout the world that she will be an instrument of God's love pointing the way to the reality of heaven. *Lord hear us. Lord graciously hear us.* We pray for all those who are suffering in any way, including those affected by the explosion in Lebanon. We pray that they will be touched by the healing hand of Jesus. *Lord hear us. Lord graciously hear us.* We pray for all the children and young people of the church. We pray that our Lord will bless them, protect them, keep them safe and help them grow in knowledge and love of Jesus. *Lord hear us. Lord graciously hear us.* We pray for our beloved dead. We pray that the Lord of our longing will receive them into the happiness of heaven. *Lord hear us. Lord graciously hear us.*

I am, Because We Are, Because God is ... Opening Hearts to Heal God's World. *God loves you and so do I*