

“Our Guide and Strong Rope”

Message by DD Adams

Providence United Methodist Church

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Today’s epistle lesson is taken from Romans 8, verses 31b through 39. I’ll be reading from the New Revised Standard Version. 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. This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God. Lord God, touch our hearing today, sharpen our attention to be solely on your words. Let us allow your spirit within our hearts to interpret what you’re saying to us, and open our hearts to receive. In Christ’s name. Amen.

Our text for today brings us to the pinnacle of the first eight chapters of the book of Romans. The love of God, as shown through the work of Christ, is unending and transforms those who receive it. This transforming love will change us more than anything else in life if we let it. When it’s recognized and

remembered throughout the day, it will give us victory over life's most enticing, challenging, and discouraging situations.

This is a letter written by the Apostle Paul. It's the first epistle in the New Testament, but it's not the first written. The letter was written to both Jews and Gentiles in Rome, and curiously, it was a church he had never visited. In verse 31, Paul says that God gave us his most precious and valuable possession—his very Son. So in doing that, it seems that God would then give us all things. Surely not the things we accumulate in life that hold no eternal value, but rather the thing that enables us to persevere through some of our most challenging situations in life.

As if we're standing in a court of law, Paul says no one can bring any charge against us. It's God who has already passed a favorable sentence on us and has already justified us! So who is there anywhere who could accuse us of anything? Christ is in the place of all-power and all-authority. He sits at God's right hand who prays for us day and night. Christ is the only judge and no one has the power or authority to separate us from the love of God.

Why? It's because of Christ's victory over death and his resurrection that we have victory. We are called "more than conquerors" and angels, rulers, things present, things to come, powers, height or depth, or anything else in all creation cannot separate us from God's love. There's nothing that can defeat God's purpose for us! Going to the words of Aretha Franklin, there ain't no mountain high enough, ain't no valley low enough, and there ain't no river wide enough. Nothing can separate us from God's love.

I've titled this message "The Guide and Strong Rope." Pretend you're climbing that high mountain Aretha Franklin was singing about. Your guide ties a rope to you. It's secure and strong. Sure enough you slip on the rocks, lose your grip at times, and wonder if you'll fall to your death and be separated forever—but

you're tied closely and safely. You're held within the grip of one who holds you fast. Christ is your guide who never slips and the rope that ties us securely to Christ is God's great love for us. It's this great love that empowers us to overcome all challenges in life.

We *overwhelmingly* overcome because of the one who died for us and rose again. It describes someone who is super-victorious, one who wins more than an ordinary victory and is overpowering in achieving abundant victory. It's like a lopsided victory in which the opponent is completely running scared. Now Paul doesn't say this out of arrogance or conceit. He says it because of his complete confidence in Christ! It's because of Christ's love that he was able to conquer death. So then because of his love, we're able to be more than conquerors.

But what if we fail? What if we're overtaken too often with a vice or maybe depression up to this point in our lives has ruled us? Does God hold these things against us? No way! The love of God for us goes back to long before we were born. When God created the universe, the earth, and all that's in it, God set his love on us. It's God's very nature to love his creation.

It's God's choice to love us despite our failures and weaknesses. Romans 5:8 says, "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Ephesians 1:4 says, God "chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world . . ." God chose to love us regardless of the wrong choices we make at times. God chose to love us whether our performance in this life is deemed worthy by others or not. God chooses to love us because God is love.

But does our disobedience threaten our standing before God? No way! But one *could* say our obedience to God and his commandments is in some way a measure of how much we love God. When we fall into sin and feel separated from God, when we hold resentment in our heart for another, when we look outwardly

rather than inwardly—God continues with us and is our guide. And though we slip and fall, we're held secure for the rope that is God's great love for us ties us securely to himself.

We're not sheltered from the storms and challenges of life, because in those we grow spiritually as we turn to God in faith. Through it all, we're super conquerors because of God's great love for us in Jesus Christ. And this great love isn't conditioned on . . . if we do this then God will do that. No, the love of God is an established fact that is unchangeable and forever. Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

From the words of the hymn "*And Can It Be that I Should Gain*", by Charles Wesley , we thank God together. "Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night; thine eye diffused a quickening ray; I woke, the dungeon flamed with light; my chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed thee. *No* condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in him, is mine; alive in him, my living Head, and clothed in righteousness divine, bold I approach th' eternal throne, and claim the crown, through Christ my own. For me? who him to death pursued? Amazing love! How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me? Amazing love! How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me? Amen.