

Who Can Be Against Us?

Proper 12/VBS

Pastor Josh Frazee

Romans 8:28-39

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“If God is for us, who can be against us?” That is our theme for this morning from our Epistle text, and really, it has been our theme all week. Over our week at Vacation Bible School, the kids, students, leaders, and I have been hearing about the Mighty Fortress that we have in God, our Father and His Son our Savior. In Him, we have a refuge, a safe place, to go to in every time of trouble. He is also our strength, so that we need not fear any evil, but can trust in Him to deliver us.

You all entered through our fortress, and over the drawbridge into the sanctuary of its walls this morning. This is one symbol of how God is our fortress and strength, refuge and security. But there has been another symbol in our decorations this week. Some of our VBS students and kids may have picked up on it, but others might not have noticed. Even you adults might have noticed it, or you might not have. That symbol is Luther’s rose.

Each of these three—the Mighty Fortress theme, Luther’s rose, and our text from Romans—they kind of tie together, especially if you know how Luther himself described his rose and its colors and images. If not, don’t worry, we’ll cover those as we also consider God our Mighty Fortress, our Savior and place of refuge.

Verse 1

Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans: “we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”

We’ve been hearing all week about how God has justified us in His Son Jesus Christ. Each of our accounts, from God leading the people of Israel into victory over the city of Jericho—the walls crashing down on the seventh day—to Jesus’ ride into Jerusalem and following death on the cross in our place, each of these has been showing us that God had a plan for us, for all of humanity. His plan was to send His Son to die for us to save us from our sins.

Yes, we are sinners. In the blackness of sin, the sin found in this world and even in our very selves, we have not kept God first. I have not done it, and you have not done it. Have you come to God’s house of worship regularly and joyfully, doing it because you want to and not because you feel you have to? If not, you have not loved God and His Word as He has commanded. Have you honored your authorities? VBS students, have you honored your parents by obeying their instructions which are given for your good? Parents, have you been faithful to bringing your children to church and teaching them God’s Word in the home, always keeping God and His Word the top priority in your lives at all times? If not, you have not kept God’s Law the way in which He intended for it to be kept. And that’s just two of the Ten Commandments.

It is easy, then, to see why Luther would begin his rose with a black cross. He said about his own rose that “First, there is a black cross in a heart that remains its natural color. This is to remind me (and all of us) that it is faith in the Crucified One that saves us. Anyone who believes from the heart will be justified (Romans 10:10). It is a black cross, which mortifies and causes pain, but it leaves the heart its natural color.” So the

cross at the center is black because it is there, on the cross, that the Crucified One paid for the sin of the entire world, including yours. When you hear and believe that Jesus has done this for you, it mortifies you to think that you have sinned and even continue to sin. You no longer desire to do it. Yet you find yourself unable to do the good which you desire to do. That is why it had to be Jesus who took your sin to the cross, making Him the Crucified One. You could not have saved yourself. You deserved eternal hell and separation from God, but Jesus suffered separation from God in your place so that you wouldn't have to.

Verse 2

Since Jesus has died for us on the cross, our text asks, “Who (then) shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?” No, again, God is for us. He is for you. He has called you by His Gospel to believe in His Son, and because you now believe in Him, God is for you. “(W)ho (then) can be against us? (God) did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who...is interceding for us.”

Jesus’ death gives us the comfort that God no longer requires a payment for our sins. There is no greater comfort than this; and there is no greater weapon against Satan either. Unfortunately, so many today do not believe Satan even exists. But the fact is Satan is just as real as the Creation account and every other account of history found in the Bible. Satan not only exists, but he does the very thing for which he is named. “Satan” is Hebrew for “accuser,” and he loves to do just that. He tempts people into sinning, and then accuses them—and yes, even you, that you have sinned. He points to an action you have done that was wrong or to an action that you should have done and didn’t do, and he says, “See, God can’t possibly love you since you did that! You broke God’s command. Other peoples’ sins are not as bad as yours.”

The Scriptures implore you not to fall for Satan’s lies and traps. Satan has been defeated at the cross of Calvary, and his accusations no longer have any sting. He wants to say that there needs to be punishment for your sins, and he is right, there is punishment. Jesus Christ has already paid the price for your sins; and because you believe that, you receive the forgiveness He has won for you. Because of this, when Satan accuses you, you can say to Satan, “You’re right; I did do that. Go take it up with the One who paid for it on the cross.” Satan has no response to that reply because he knows that he was beaten there at the cross. There is no greater joy than knowing that you are forgiven, and in Christ, you are.

That’s why Luther put more in his rose than just a black cross in a heart. Here’s how he continued his own description of how his rose should appear: “The heart should stand in the middle of a white rose. This is to show that faith gives joy, comfort, and peace—it puts the believer into a white, joyous rose. Faith does not give peace and joy like the world gives (John 14:27). This is why the rose must be white, not red...This rose should stand in a sky-blue field, symbolizing that a joyful spirit and faith is a beginning of heavenly, future joy, which begins now, but is grasped in hope, not yet fully revealed.”

Verse 3

Our hope has not yet been fully revealed. As we heard last weekend, hope that is seen is not hope. Nevertheless, we have assurance in Christ Jesus’ death and resurrection that because He died and lives, we will also. We may still live in a sinful world and in sinful bodies, but these, to Paul, are not worth considering. Just look at the end of our text.

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 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.”

Nothing can separate you believers from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Neither the world nor Satan nor anyone or anything else. So, again, who can separate us from the love of God found in Christ Jesus? Who can separate *you* from it? No one and no-thing. And because of that, we know where we are going. This brings us to the outside of Luther’s rose.

“Around the field of blue is a golden ring to symbolize that blessedness in heaven lasts forever and has no end. Heavenly blessedness is exquisite, beyond all joy and better than any possessions, just as gold is the most valuable and precious metal (<http://lutheranreformation.org/history/the-luther-seal-summary-of-the-gospel/>).”

This morning we have heard how nothing can separate us from God in Christ Jesus our Lord, His death and resurrection. We’ve heard how Luther’s rose symbolizes this fact. And because of that fact, we can know, believe, and trust that God is our—yours and my—Mighty Fortress, a strong refuge and place of safety, for all of us who are in Christ Jesus our Lord. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.