

SERMON

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We are made to be connected. We are made to be connected to God, to one another and to all of creation. People are not meant to be lonely; people are not meant to be separated, 'it is not good for man to be alone', words spoken by God when man was placed in the garden. But when sin made its way into the world, separation became part of the human condition.

All of us have experienced separation over the last months. Maybe that is still your situation. In lockdown we have been separated from family members. I was not able to visit my ageing father for many months. Borders were closed and my father does not do computers. But thankfully we can speak by phone. We've also not been able to see all our church friends. It's been great to see people online, but I'm also aware that we have not seen everyone. Separation is loss. Large or small. Some of our separations might look small when we hear the following. A few days ago, I visited our mission to seafarers port chaplain in Rotterdam, and he told me that because of Covid, roughly two hundred and fifty thousand seafarers worldwide are separated from their families for many months.

Staying on a ship for more than five months is considered inhumane, but by now several seafarers have been on their ships for six, nine, twelve months or longer. Some have even celebrated two birthdays on board in one trip. Thankfully, this week there was the happy story of one Filipino man who was able to finally return home after having been separated from his wife and young daughter for thirteen and a half months.

Over the last few weeks Paul has taken us on an epic journey in the letter to the Romans. From the dark valleys of human sin, suffering and separation, to the glorious peaks of hope, joy, and abundant life. And today we reach a glorious peak. If God is for us, who can be against us. He who 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. In the garden Jesus experienced loneliness himself and Jesus experienced utter separation on the cross. But Jesus overcame the separation of death. And in Jesus all separation can and will be brought to an end.

When we experience separation now, Jesus is there right with us. 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?' Paul asks. Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution or famine, or nakedness or danger or sword? And the answer of course is no. Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of Christ. And Paul spoke from experience. Just read his life story. Paul knew that God can take the struggles we go through and turn them for good. Paul also knew that in Jesus we can know God's presence by His Holy Spirit when we suffer. The Holy Spirit assures us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit assures us that we completely belong to God's family, and that we all will share in the joyous glory to come.

The Holy Spirit also helps us in our prayers and in our weakness. And helps us to become more like Jesus. So that we children, God's children, can bring relief and blessing to all who groan in loneliness and separation. We can act because we have received the immeasurable love in Jesus Christ, the immeasurable love we cannot keep for ourselves.

I hope that this very moment you may feel connected with the God who loves you, as we together listen to God's word, as we pray and worship together, as we hear the eucharistic prayer and join in spiritual communion. That the Holy Spirit may give you that encouragement and assurance. That whether we face illness, or lockdown, or isolation, or job loss, or uncertainty, we may know that suffering will not conquer hope. That death will not conquer life. Separation is never final. Pauls says, 'for I am sure that neither death nor life, nor ages 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 us from the love of God. Nothing because of Jesus. Amen.