

Did you catch the list of things that can be against us? “Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword.” (v.35) Those things can shake your confidence. When you are experiencing troubles, sickness, want, or any kind of violence, those things can make you stop and wonder ‘Where in the world is God’s love?’ “**Who** can be against us?” St. Paul asks. “Well, lots of things.”

In China, the government is very much against Christians. A news story I read this past week states that Communist authorities are demanding that believers in Christ there must renounce their faith. They forbid Christians from having images of Jesus in their homes and if they do not replace those images with pictures of Chairman Mao and President Xi Jinping, poor Christians risk losing their welfare benefits. (<https://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2020/07/20/china-orders-christians-to-take-down-images-of-jesus-from-homes/>)

“Who can be against us?” In other parts of the world it gets even worse. Over the last decade in Nigeria, radical Muslims have killed some 52,000 Christians in that African nation. And, according to an article in this month’s *Lutheran Witness*, many of those killed are our fellow Lutherans. Christians in Nigeria have become a target of two jihadist terrorist groups- Boko Haram and Fulani- which seek to eliminate all the Christians so that the region will be completely Muslim.

This news piece goes on to say: “The story is also nearly always the same: heavily armed jihadis suddenly appear in the dead of night. They attack house after house, breaking down doors, shouting *Allahu akbar*. They shoot the elderly **and** able-bodied men. They **rape**, (do unspeakable things), mutilate, and murder women. They kidnap young boys and girls. They torch houses, schools, and churches.”

“There are about as many Missouri Synod Lutherans in the United States as there are Lutherans in jeopardy in Nigeria.” The *Lutheran Witness* article concludes by putting this thought-provoking question to us: “Would we be willing to endure the same persecution, the same martyrdom?” (<https://witness.lcms.org/2020/lutheran-martyrs-in-nigeria/>)

I pray the day never comes where similar things happen to Christians in our part of the world. Yet, just this summer in the United States and Canada over 50 churches have been vandalized, burned, or had statues of Jesus destroyed. The purpose of these recent attacks on churches in our country during violent protests is clear: to intimidate and instill fear in the hearts of those who worship Christ, people like you and me. Where could this be heading?

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2020/jul/15/black-lives-matter-protesters-turn-rage-churches-r/>
https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/interactive-map-shows-growing-number-of-catholic-churches-statues-being-attacked?utm_content=buffer701ea&utm_medium=LSN%2Bbuffer&utm_source=facebook&utm_campaign=LSN&fbclid=IwARONbzSKj7M5zU6Na0IR_Lh_oel3KwLZEBMQCBB8bR2yKrryISJW5gPWW28

Persecution, danger, violence. When you hear about these things and see some of the images on tv or online, you may very well wonder, “How far away *is* God’s love?”

But distress and tribulation do not always come from other people. Sometimes it is a natural disaster or sometimes it is a worldwide health crisis: The latest figures state that there are now over four million cases of the Coronavirus in the United States resulting in over a 146,000 fatalities. (foxnews.com as of 7.25.20) Where *is* God’s love?

Another distressing consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic is the division that precautions are causing among many people. “To mask or not to mask.” That is the question nowadays. The governor’s mandate seems to have answered that question.

‘It’s about Constitutional rights as citizens to not be forced to wear a mask,’ some argue. While others contend that ‘it’s about protecting the health of your fellow citizens, as well as, your own’. The debate rages on, tempers flare, and we wonder how far away God’s love is, especially this year when there seems to be so *many* things against us.

Let’s go back to our text from Romans 8, right before that list of things that can be against us, things that can shake our confidence and make us wonder how far can God’s love can really be away from us. Here St. Paul delivers to us the image of a courtroom when he asks, “Who will bring any *charge* against God’s elect?”

Imagine that courtroom scene being played out right here in front of everyone, in the front of the Sanctuary. And there *you* sit in the seat of the accused. And the charges are brought against you.

The first witness to testify against you is called to the stand. It is an old classmate from your school days who can never forget the names you used to call them, the way you bullied and put them down. The next witness is a family member whom you spoke harsh words against one time and there has been an icy chill between the two of you ever since.

Following that, audio evidence is presented by the prosecuting attorney of times when you were impatient with a store clerk or someone on the phone. And the words you use in anger ruined that person’s day.

Next, video evidence is shown to all of you driving while talking on a phone, not paying attention while driving and putting people’s lives at risk.

Other images are presented of you missing an opportunity to pray for someone; not paying attention to a person when they were in need.

The next witness is called. It is a computer technician who has access to all the data showing how much time you have spent on the internet and social media, when you could have been getting work done or working on a family relationship. All your Facebook posts, snaps, Instagram messages, and emails you have sent or posts you have posted some of them in anger and should not have been posted at all. The evidence is all there for everyone to see.

Who is the lawyer against you? Satan, whose name means **accuser**. He lays it all out there. When you hear the accusations and the condemnation, which also come from your own conscience about these and all your sins, you wonder how much further away can God's love be?

Who can separate us from the love of God? Listen to what Paul says: "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 shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus."

Nothing. Not tribulations. Not tragedies. Nothing. Not even our sins. Yes, there are so many things that can stand against us, but St. Paul tells us that he is sure; he is convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love. And why is that?

Because God gave us His Son, the crucified, risen, and glorified One. And if He gives us His Son, He will give us **all** things. He will give us the strength when we are threatened. **Compassion** when evil attacks. He will take care of our prayers that need to be answered.

He also gives us one another in the church to support one another. What's more, you pick up a Bible and there in God's Word the love of God flows to us from those pages.

In Holy Communion Jesus' very presence fills you in that little piece of bread and sip of wine. It is His body and blood for your forgiveness and strength. Then you remember your Baptism. When that water splashes on your head remember how God scoops you up there as His child. Go to His Word and Sacraments. Go to the places God has promised to be, and He is so very close to you in His love.

In worship, God's presence is invoked: "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" and yes, "God Himself is Present", just like we sang in our opening hymn today.

Amid all that is against us, **God is for us**. And who can condemn us if God justifies us? Nobody! Who or what can separate us from God's love? No one! Nothing!

Earlier in the book of Romans, Paul simply wrote: God demonstrates His love for us when we were still sinners, Christ died for us. If you wonder where God is, remember the cross. Jesus is suffering the punishment for our sins. "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" **Jesus** is taking the punishment of separation and not us.

So, Paul can write in the beginning of Romans chapter 8, "There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

In the Absolution, at the beginning of the Divine Service, you hear these words - Jesus' words - spoken and applied to you, "Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit." There is now no condemnation for **you** who are in Christ Jesus. **No condemnation.**

Who shall separate us? Who shall separate us from God's love? Jesus is risen from the dead, He is interceding for us, praying for us. At the end of Matthew, He says, "I am with you **always** even to the end of the age."

Whatever the news of the day brings, whatever the daily grind and tediousness of life brings, whatever the stress, worry, lack of sleep may bring, "I am with you," Jesus says, "always interceding." Always praying to His Father for us. Always looking out for us.

Of this, Paul is **certain**. And his certainty comes because of God's love in Jesus Christ. God is **for** us. He justifies us and we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us.

And nothing will be able to separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus. Amen.