

Jesus loves me, this I know

Romans 8:26-39

July 24, 2011

Sometimes, it's more than I can handle. This living business.

I pray and I work, hard. I make decisions and take action with the best of intentions. I care and I invest myself -- emotionally and materially -- in making life good for those I love, and in making this world a more just and more generous and more compassionate place for all of us.

And still there is pain and trouble and brokenness and indifference all around.

Calamity falls on the heads of those I love, and those I love bring down calamity on their own heads.

The country I love suffers the consequences of its inability to act decisively to address the problems that face us, our public conversations so bitterly divisive and terribly ungracious, our leaders more concerned about scoring political points and winning elections and sabotaging rivals than attending to the welfare of the citizens they were elected to serve.

And the earth I love is racked by unending violence, plagued by famine, reeling from one disaster after another, natural and unnatural.

It's hard and it hurts. When you care, you hurt. Sometimes, it's more than I can handle.

But the Spirit comes to help us!

The Spirit comes to help us, weak as we are ...

Weak as we are? Now that's something I can identify with!

We do not know how we ought to pray ...

Amen to that! What do I say? What should I pray for? Sometimes, I can't find the words to express the longing and the aching and the frustration and the befuddlement and the grief. But "the Spirit pleads with God for us in groans that words cannot express." Ahhhhh ...

The Spirit comes to help us. God is not way out there, watching us from a distance, waiting to see what we will make of our lives, waiting to see what we will make of all of this. God is among us and alongside us and in us -- praying for us, pulling for us, working with us.

God is here, among us, working for good .

In all things, God works for good with those who love him ...

In all things! In every situation! All the time! So we need not despair. We need not be rendered powerless by a life that seems more than we can handle. Instead, we “let go and let God.”

No. That’s not the answer. I’ve always been a little bit uneasy with that slogan, and this scripture has helped me understand why.

In all things, God works for good with those who love him ...

We don’t let go. We don’t stop working. We don’t stop praying. We take hope from knowing that God’s Spirit prays with us and for us, and that God is working for good in all things with us.

It’s all about hope. Hope is empowering, while despair is disempowering. When I hope, I am energized and motivated and determined, but when I despair, I do nothing. If I feel that whatever I do is useless, that is despair and I do nothing. But if I “let go and let God,” that still betrays a belief that whatever I do is useless. It is just another expression of despair, just another way of choosing to do nothing.

We don’t stop working and we don’t stop praying because we know what we do matters, because we know God is working for good with us. “Keep on working with fear and trembling to complete your salvation,” Paul wrote to the Philippians, “because God is always at work in you.”

But what then sustains our hope, weak as we are? This ...

*Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so,
little ones to him belong, we are weak, but he is strong ...*

Jesus loves me! The son of George and Kathi Ensworth, the husband of Lynne Schrader, father to Matt and Henry and Louisa, grandfather to Noah and Jack and Jacob and Sam and Hayden, pastor to you. Jesus loves me! He cares what becomes of me. He wants what is best for me. He wants to bring what is best out of me.

“Jesus loves me.” Say it! Say it again!

Do you believe it? Do you believe it? When you do believe it -- believe that Jesus loves me -- there is no more powerful motivator. I want to be just the person, I want to do just the things, that please the One who loves me! I want to do and be the best, because it matters, because I matter, because I matter to the One whose judgment matters most.

Jesus loves me. Jesus loves you. And there is nothing -- nothing -- that can separate us from the love of Christ. Trouble can't do it. Hardship can't do it. Persecution can't do it. Being hungry or poor or threatened can't do it. None of these things separate us from the love of Christ.

Not even death can do it. Death cannot, does not, separate us from the love of Christ.

There is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord ...

That's why we keep praying, even when we don't know how we ought to pray.

That's why we keep caring and keep working, even when it seems more than we can handle.

That's why we live, not merely reacting to the circumstances of our lives as they are, but living proactively in anticipation and celebration of our lives as they one day will be.

Baptism is an outward and visible sign of the grace of God ...

Remember your baptism! It is the sign of God's grace put upon you. It is the mark of God's love put on your body. It is the sign of what, once given, can never be taken from you.

This is not cheap grace, a free pass, a “get out of jail free” card. Grace doesn't mean that God looks the other way and that it doesn't really matter what we do. This is costly grace, costly love, the love of the One who gives up much, so much, for our sake.

This is the love of the One who is the source of all true loves, God engaged and involved and intimately entwined in our lives and in our destinies. This is the love that comforts and heals, the love that challenges and transforms, the love that is never happy with evil, but only with the truth. This is the love that never gives up, the love that never fails.

That's the meaning of baptism. That is the meaning of Nathan Pavelski's baptism, the meaning of my baptism, the meaning of your baptism. So when you feel like this is all more than you can handle, remember your baptism and remember the love of which it is the sign.

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