

PENTECOST 8
GENESIS 29:15-28
ROMANS 8:26-39
MATTHEW 13:31-33, 44-52
JULY 29, 30, 2017

YEAR A

We have many things we regard as being valuable. It might be our homes, cars or retirement accounts. What we regard as valuable might be the relationships we are in. We certainly value our spouse, children and parents. We know that Mason Claus Schmitt is a valuable part of our family. In the waters of baptism Mason is claimed by God and is a valuable part of the family of God as well as our family.

Our readings this week tell about things that are valuable among the people in the Bible. Last week we heard about Jacob being a scoundrel. He was someone that cheated, lied and schemed to turn things in his own direction. Our reading today from Genesis 29 shows that the tables of deception were turned on Jacob so that he did not receive what was most valuable to him. He wanted Rachel as his wife. He worked seven years for his uncle Laban so that Rachel might be given to him. After seven years he was given Leah to be his wife instead of Rachel. He would work seven more years. It was worth the wait and the work for Jacob to finally have Rachel.

Jesus told parables about treasures hidden in fields, a merchant with fine pearls and an abundance of fish in the sea. Each treasure is gained because something is sold or there is the work of sorting the good from the bad. Most of us will work hard to achieve what we regard as valuable to us or that which is desired. We will do lots of things to get what is important to us.

Romans 8:31, 32 What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He 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?

This past week our vacation Bible School had its focus on Paul's Letter to the Romans. The main teaching that was highlighted throughout the week was the gift of God's love. Part of our teaching was that being a child of God is the most important part of who we are. We also taught that sharing God's word is an important part of our relationship with God and with each other. With each passing day the love of God was shared in many different ways. As I studied the scriptures for this week and as our VBS staff shared the message of God's love from Romans I heard again these words, "If God is for us, who can be against us." I heard that God does not exclude us from coming under the umbrella of God's grace and mercy. I am thankful for all that were part of our VBS this year. The word of God from Romans came alive in ways that do not normally happen. Romans came alive so that those in the VBS can also have that word become a living word in each of our lives.

God does not exclude us but includes and invites us into the body of Christ and into a closer relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We sometimes look at these words from Paul's letter and think about who is in and who is out. Which of us have gotten it right and which of us has missed the mark? The language of Romans 8 might cause us to think that God's love isn't for all people or that there are some that are excluded based on where they came from or what they were doing. God's love is for all of us. God reaches out to us through Jesus Christ and we are empowered by the Holy Spirit so that we are brought into the family of God. Paul wrote about difficult teachings like foreknowledge and predestination but Paul wants us to know the love of God that comes through Christ Jesus. Paul teaches that God's people are formed in the image of God and in the life of Jesus who died and rose again.

As we gathered this week in our VBS we learned that God's love is a gift that comes without our paying for it. It comes to us as a gift but we are to cling to that gift. The gift of God's love changes our lives so that we draw closer to God who has already drawn closer to us. Our kids and our adults heard about the

wonderful gift of grace. We heard about God being patient with us and allowing us to grow in faith and love. Our kids grew in knowledge of Paul and the book of Romans. With each passing day the kids became more and more engulfed in the message of God's love for us.

Romans 8:37-39 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor 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.

There are many things that seek to get in the way of our experience of God's love. Paul's list is a long one but it covers many parts of our lives. It tells of many things that get in the way of God's love. We live in a time where there are many distractions in our lives. We are pulled in many different directions. With all of the distractions in our lives we have one that keeps us secure and on track. Paul says that nothing can separate us from God's love. It is good for us to rest on this promise.

I had one evening of VBS this week where I was distracted from the work at hand. The distractions had to do with the work I am called to. Quite often we must turn the page rather quickly if we are to do what the Lord calls us to. I was very inspired by our VBS materials and was looking forward to each new day's teaching. One evening I found myself having trouble getting into the teaching. Earlier that afternoon I had been with a person in the last days of his life. I sat with him and his wife and we talked about many things. It was a difficult time for me as I sat with a friend and colleague. After spending some time I left their home with great sadness. Two ours later I was sitting in the VBS underground church helping children learn about God's love being a gift. I was leading music that praises God and shares this same love.

As I was distracted I heard words of hope and peace. Martha sat in the underground church with me offering words of assurance and hope. She

acknowledged that I was doing the work before me. She allowed me to share the burden that was on my spirit. As she was ministering to me I heard the voices of Mike and Dave on the outside of our tent speaking words of God's grace and of God's love. They spoke of God's love being a special gift and that gift is to be shared. I reminded me that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The truth is that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Paul says that nothing, not even death, can remove God's love from us. God's love is for each of us. As we receive and live in this love our lives are changed. We come under the umbrella of God's love and we have a peace that only God can give. It is a peace that passes all human understanding. It allows us to rest in Christ Jesus our Lord. AMEN