

For Us and With Us  
Romans 8:31-39

There's something about holding someone else's hand. Picture these scenes in your mind: a new parent holding the tiny hand of their newborn son or daughter; a teacher holding the hand of a timid kindergartener as they cross the playground; a student athlete reaching out a hand to help someone who has fallen in a competition; a young, nervous couple holding hands for the first time; a beaming bride and groom standing hand in hand before a pastor on their wedding day; an elderly man holding the hand of his beloved wife of many decades; a family holding the hand of their loved one as he or she passes from this life to the next.

Today is Lutheran Women's Missionary League Sunday. With their mite money these women share the Gospel of Jesus Christ around the world. For decades, the LWML has given a strong witness to how God's love holds each of us in His hand.

Our God is for us and with us. St. Paul writes in Romans 8:31: *"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"*

Sometimes it is tempting to think that our success depends on our grip, our hold on things. But the apostle Paul gives a different perspective. He makes it quite clear that God's love holds us. When we are insufficient, He is all-sufficient.

I hesitate to say the word snow, but as I was working on this sermon on Wednesday, I remembered a short story I read some years ago. A father and young son are walking through

the snow. It's not deep, but it is slippery. The boy falls down. When he gets back up he says, "Dad, I think I should hold your hand." He does, and they continue on their way. Pretty soon the boy slips again, loses his grip on his dad's hand and falls. This time when he gets up he says, "Dad, I think you should hold my hand."

Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have no fear slipping into condemnation. Paul writes: *"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. 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 at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."* (Romans 8:31-34)

Why did Jesus die? To pay for our sins! Why was He raised? Because the Father accepted this payment. The check cleared! It didn't bounce because of insufficient funds. The death of Jesus was payment in full so we might live eternally.

And now, Jesus is interceding for us, fully engaged in the battle for us. And we need it. Who of us in the past week has been perfect? Maybe you have to go back further than a week, but how many of us have said things we would later regret? Have you spoken to a loved one in a tone you wish you could take back? Have your words or actions sown seeds of discord rather than peace? Yes, and me too. Yes, to all of the above.

The law is convicting because it shows us exactly where we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The pit is pretty deep...but God's love is deeper still. His arm is long and able to rescue us. His stretched-out arms on the cross of Calvary did rescue us. Those same arms were made alive again as Jesus was raised from the dead. Jesus is for us and with us. Even though Satan wants to accuse and condemn you, Jesus was crucified and has risen. We have no fear of condemnation.

The important mission of LWML shares this life-saving and life-giving truth with the world. For many decades, through LWML, Gospel seeds have been sown.

Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have no fear of separation. God will not let go of your hand! Paul continues in chapter 8: *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' 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."* (Romans 8:35-39)

Notice what Paul does not say in this text. He does not say that life will be free of challenges and difficult circumstances. He does not say that distress or danger will not happen. We know this from our own experiences. Each

of us could make a list of our own struggles of daily living. But God declares you righteous and loved in Jesus. Our assurance comes from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have certainty of victory. That victory is made yours personally through the gift of baptism. St. Paul says in Romans 6:4: *"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."* Baptism brings victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil. We are more than conquerors.

Our victory is not secure because of our hold on Christ, but by His hold on us. We are more than conquerors because He holds tightly to us. We may live each day confidently trusting in Jesus. As a baptized child of God, remain in His Word. Gather for worship and Sunday school. Be diligent in private devotions. Be reminded of your identity as a victorious one in Christ. Rely on His grace.

Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have no fear of condemnation. Jesus paid the price for our sins. Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have no fear of separation. Jesus holds us tightly in His hand. Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have certainty of victory. His Spirit gives and strengthens His victory gifts in us through His word and sacraments. Thank you, Lord Jesus. Amen.