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PRESIDENT'S LETTER - MARCH 06

“We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37)

If I remember correctly, the Sundays in Lent are not counted as a part of the forty days of Lent. The Sundays remain celebrations of Jesus' resurrection victory. We sometimes forget that Lent is a victory celebration journey toward the cross. The battle of Lent was joined at the cross. The Gospel reading for the first Sunday in Lent reminds us that the battle between Satan and man's representative, the second Adam, began with Jesus' temptation. The Old Testament reading reminds us that this battle really began in the Garden of Eden where the Devil succeeded in tempting Eve and Adam to sin against their loving Creator. Now the Seed of the Woman would crush the head of the serpent. Lent shows us this battle, and Jesus' victory at the cross.

Lent reveals the suffering, the scorn, the rejection that Jesus experienced as He walked the way of the cross. But things are not always as they seem. This apparent defeat of the cross is God's victory over sin, death, and the devil. So also our lives and our ministry is always under the cross. The paradox of the cross is revealed in the difference between the way the world and sometimes we see ourselves and our ministry, and the way God sees us and our ministry. We are judged “as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” (2 Corinthians 6:9-10)

As pastors, we live under the cross, and yet we are more than conquerors. Our work in the Lord is never in vain. As we look at dwindling midweek Lenten attendance because our people are too busy and involved in other things, and as we look at ourselves, we may wonder about our ministry. The season of Lent and the cross of Christ answers these questions and doubts for us according to Romans 8 as the Holy Spirit assures us that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

1. What then shall we say to these things?

Paul has just asserted that “all” things work together for good. However, the reality of our present circumstances seems to give lie to this confident confession. The Christian is not immune to suffering and weakness and disappointment and fear. In fact, the Psalmist cries out often, “Why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper?” The first question is essentially, “Faced with all this, what can we say?” Are there any satisfactory answers to the realities of the sufferings of this present age? You will find no answers if you think in terms of this world and the things of this world. You will find no answers if you look to yourself.

Paul says, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Note that the Bible does not stress that we are on God's side. The saving conclusion is that the almighty God is on our side. If God is on our side, who could harm us or stand successfully against us? But how do we know that God could possibly be on our side? The realities of our lives seem to argue that God has forsaken us. The realities of our sinful disobedience and many failures seem to make it impossible that God could ever take our side. God is for us in Immanuel that name given to Jesus meaning “God-With-Us.” God did not spare His only Son but sent Him into this world of sin and suffering in the form of a servant. God loved us so much that He gave Jesus up for us all. You have to go to the cross to see the greatness of God's love for us. Then it is possible to conclude that having given His Son for us, God would also, along with Jesus, graciously give us all things. In

the cross, see the certainty of God's answer to all these things: God indeed is for us. He is on our side.

2. Who shall bring a charge against God's elect?

There are many who would line up against us. Satan, the Great Accuser, will stand as the prosecuting attorney and would love to accuse us of the many things that we have done against God and against each other. Our own consciences would accuse us of all those shortcomings which are so well-known to us. The point of Paul is that none of these charges will stand. No one will be able to bring a charge that will stand up against us because of Christ.

The Holy Spirit again answers our doubts. The answer is built on the first seven chapters of Romans and the cross of Christ. It is God who justifies. The picture of justification is that of a court room. God hears the charges against us and renders the verdict - justified, declared innocent. The case is closed. Who could reopen the case? We will stand before the almighty Judge on the last day and, as the chosen of God, will be acquitted.

3. Who is he that condemns?

Again who could condemn to hell and judgement, one whom God has justified? As we said, Satan, our own conscience, and even friends, such as Job had, condemn us. We cry out with Paul, "The good that I would do, I don't do and the evil I don't want to do, I just keep on doing." The answer will never be found in us and our life-style, our good works, or anything that we have done. All of these condemn us in the end. The answer is found in Christ Jesus. More than this - in Christ Jesus who died. There it all is. Christ Jesus, God's holy Son died for us. No one was more condemned and accused as was Jesus. He was accused and condemned by the rabble, the soldiers, and the thieves who were crucified with Him. But He was also accused, found guilty, and condemned by God because Jesus bore the sins of all of us. But that's not the end of the story. More than that, Jesus was raised to life. The cross would mean nothing without the empty tomb. We do not have a dead martyr. We have a living Savior. Even when we sin, as we do, this living Jesus pleads for us. "If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous." All of this for us.

4. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Now we get to the crux of the question. What about all of those things that intrude into our existence and bring sorrow and pain and death? The Devil, the world, and even our own flesh conclude that God really doesn't love us. Faith sees these "bad" things also as gracious gifts of God's love toward us. We have not even suffered the sum total of these seven nouns as did some of the early Christian martyrs. Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword separate us from the love of God? Not only is it true, but I am persuaded by faith that these things cannot separate us from the love of God. In all of these things, we are more than conquerors. We have a victorious faith and hope in Christ who conquered all of our enemies for us.

In all of the situations mentioned in verses 38-39, we experience pain, suffering, lonesomeness, abandonment, doubt, and yet none of these things can separate us from the love of God. This love of God is revealed in connection with Christ Jesus, our Lord.

These are the answers of Lent. Preach the cross of Christ and His victory for us during this Lenten season.

John Schierenbeck

Professor John Pfeiffer was the only name placed in nomination for the office of ILC president for a two-year term beginning June 1, 2006. The Call Committee for CLC Institutions will meet on Tuesday, April 25, 2006. Comments may be sent to the secretary: Pastor Ted Barthels.