

The Road Less Traveled – March 16, 2018

Some things in life, you simply know. I know, for instance, that when I toss a ball straight up in the air that it will come down in short order. I know that gravity causes this, but I would be hard pressed to explain precisely how it works. Likewise I know that when I take a breath, there is a precise mixture of oxygen, nitrogen and other trace gases from which my lungs extract what my body needs to survive. Again, I cannot prove this, and if this mixture were to get out of balance, the air in my house would look the same to me. But I know of this with such certainty that I do not even think about it as I draw each breath.

I was reminded of that type of certainty the other day when I read some familiar words from Paul's letter to the Romans. If God is on our side, Paul questions, what could possibly cause us concern? And how do we know God is on our side? The proof is in God's willingness to give us Jesus.

It may seem strange that Paul would pen perhaps his most eloquent exposition of God's grace immediately following a discussion of God's foreknowledge and predestination. And yet for Paul, these two concepts go hand in hand, summed up best in the concluding verses the 8th Chapter: "For I am convinced 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." Interestingly, however, I always have tended to insert "except ourselves" into Paul's list. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ Jesus ... except ourselves. It was, perhaps, my way of reminding myself that during those times that I feel apart from God, it was I who turned away and not God.

And yet, reading this familiar passage once again, I am struck by my willingness to twist Paul's words, which are nothing if not clear. Paul very deliberately lists all the categories of creation — natural and supernatural — that exercise power over us, essentially dismissing them all before God's love. What Paul means is that there is no other power than God's which can affect our final destiny.

Thus there is nothing that can happen to us during our lives that can have a negative effect on God's love for us. But perhaps the greatest comfort here is in the reminder that we, too, are creatures. And so if no creature can separate us from God's love, then even our seemingly limitless ability to turn away from God ultimately fails.

In the end, that is the assurance of which Paul writes. God saves us even from ourselves. Do we have choices in this life? Absolutely. But we are created and destined to be a people loved by our Creator. No proof is required. That proof, you might say, died centuries ago.

See you Sunday.