

Sermon for Sunday, June 29, 1975, by Andrew A. Jumper, D. D., Pastor  
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"WHOSE SIDE IS GOD ON?"

Romans 8:31-39

Text: "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Romans 8:31

If any one word best characterizes life, it is the word "change." There is hardly any area of life that escapes change. Look, for example, at the technological changes in our lifetime. We have seen supersonic air travel, space exploration, and a man on the moon. We have seen the development of ballistic missiles capable of placing bombs on target thousands of miles away. There is no point on the globe, we are told, that is more than 22 minutes away from total destruction.

Politically we have seen the development of third world nations whose location we cannot pinpoint and whose names we have difficulties pronouncing. It is a time of international tension when two minor nations can ignite a war that might involve the whole world. Sociologically we also live in a changing world. With mass urbanization and tremendous population mobility we have seen the breakdown of many of our mores as well as a collapse of much of the family structure. We have just gone through a time of racial revolutions and crisis when the structure of the law was under attack and when issues were being settled in the streets. The list of changes could go on and on.

And what is man's deepest desire in the midst of this changing world? Perhaps it is best expressed by the writer of one of our hymns who cried out, "Change and decay in all around I see. Oh, thou who changest not, abide with me." Yes, a stable point of reference, an anchor in the midst of the storm of change--a longing for one who never changes to be with us.

Our age is not unique. History is the record of change. And always man has had this need for a stable reference point. Thus the psalmist could write centuries ago, "Therefore will we not fear, though the earth do change, and though the mountains be shaken into the heart of the seas, though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains tremble with the swelling thereof. The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our Refuge. (Psalm 46:1-3,11)

Centuries after the psalmist wrote, change was still sweeping the world. In Germany the smoldering fires of the Reformation were beginning to blaze. One of those Reformers, Martin Luther, was forced at one point to flee for his life. He took refuge in the Wartburg Castle, a mighty fortress built high on the crest of a jutting hill. There in the refuge of his walled castle, Luther read the words of the ancient psalmist and out of his own time of threat and fear, he wrote his immortal hymn that we sang earlier, "A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing." Luther concluded his great hymn with these words: "Let goods and kindred go; this mortal life also; the body they may kill; God's truth abideth still; His kingdom is forever!"

Today you and I still live in the midst of change. We, like the psalmist and Luther, need a stable reference point. Indeed, we need to know, whose side is God on? In our scripture for this morning St. Paul tells us that God is on our side. Notice first of all that he tells us God is for us. He puts it this way: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" And is this not the incredible claim of the New Testament

Listen to what it says: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...for when we were yet without strength, in due season Christ died for the ungodly...But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us...Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us." Yes, the incredible message that God is for us.

Some years ago a Russian leader visiting America said, "History is on our side. We will sink you." But who cares for history when God is on our side? A Roman Catholic cardinal once told Luther, "What do you think the Pope cares for the opinion of a German peasant? The Pope's little finger is stronger than all Germany. Do you expect your princes to take up arms to defend you? I tell you, 'no.' And where will you be then?" Luther replied, "Where I am now. In the hands of Almighty God."

The Bible tells us that even a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without God and that we are worth many sparrows; it tells us that even the hairs of our head are numbered. Whoever you are this morning, whatever changes threaten your life, the Good News of the Bible is this: God is for you.

As you are living out your life, you may feel alone and lonely. You may feel isolated and cut off and you may wonder if anyone cares. You may feel that you are by yourself in the midst of a world so busy with its own business that nobody notices, nobody cares. But St. Paul affirms to you that there is someone who does care. God cares and He is for you.

Notice in the second place that God is on our side because He is the Forgiver-- God is in the business of forgiving. Do you remember how St. Paul put it? "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies." (Romans 8:13) Phillips translates the passage this way, "Who dares accuse us now? The Judge Himself has declared us free from sin."

I have a problem getting myself free from Sin. Is that your experience? Ever since the dawn of Freudian psychology, the psychologists have tried to abolish sin. The Freudian doctrine works on the assumption that man has been too good; that he has within him impulses, especially those of lust and hostility, which he has been unsuccessfully inhibiting. Health, says the psychologist, lies in expressing those impulses. In other words, we must destroy all of our standards, remove our inhibition and give expression to the animal emotions that often grip our souls. Unfortunately, in attempting to abolish sin, they have only succeeded in abolishing moral restraint and a new hell is created--not the old metaphysical hell of Dante, but the Freudian hell of psychosis and neurosis. As one modern Freudian psychologist put it, "I tell my patients...never, under any circumstances, to blame or punish anyone, especially themselves, for anything: then it will be virtually impossible for them ever to become seriously upset." And you know, if a person could do that--never blame himself for anything--maybe he never would get upset! But man does blame himself--he knows there is a moral standard in the universe. He knows he is more than an animal and that somehow he is a spiritual creature, too. He knows there is a restlessness in his heart until somehow he is in tune with God.

So our problem is not to deny there is a moral law, but the problem is what do we do because in our hearts we know we have broken it. Our problem is not to be told to do as we please. Our problem is we have already done that and what we desperately need now is to be told that we are forgiven. Not long ago, a lady sat

in my study in tears. She had hit the bottom of life's barrel. Her face was gaunt and she nervously twisted a handkerchief in her hands and occasionally wiped at the tears streaming down her cheeks. "I did something I should not have done," she said, "and I had to have psychiatric care. He told me that I shouldn't punish myself for what I had done and that I had to learn to express my needs without feeling guilty. I tried it and things are worse than ever. Inside I feel as though I'm dying. Can you help me?"

And is not this our problem, too? We don't need to feel the freedom to sin more. No, our agony, our yearning desire, the aching passion of our souls is to be forgiven for the sins we have already committed. Isn't that what you want more than anything else this morning, and basically isn't that why you are here--because you feel the need to be forgiven? Well, you have come to the right place. You see, God is in the business of forgiving. Do you remember how St. Paul put it? He wrote, "For God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." And then St. Paul adds, "not counting their sins against them." Whatever you have done this morning, whatever sin you have committed, God is on your side because He will forgive you. As your scripture for this morning says, "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies."

Then, thirdly, notice that because God is on our side He is faithful. St. Paul puts it this way, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" There are not many things in life that a man can count on in the assurance that they will always be there. What is there in your life that you can count on to sustain you and which you know will always be there to support you? We do not dare count on material things, for like the rich fool who built greater barns, we will find that one day our souls are required of us. Even the love of those dearest to us may grow cold. Many things come to destroy the foundations upon which we build our lives, for we experience tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, or sword. Yet, in the midst of the worst that life can do to us, we discover that God is faithful. His love never lets us go, for "who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" In the Book of Common Worship of our Church is the funeral service for the dead. Actually, the service is for the living and it is designed to bring comfort and hope in the midst of death and despair. At a time like that we need to know that God is faithful, that in spite of death there is something or someone who will not fail us. Our Scripture for today is a part of that service and someday you will sit before the casket of a loved one--or a loved one will sit before yours--and the minister will read those words, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" and then you will know that neither death nor life, nor any other creature, shall separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Then you will know that when everything else fails you, God is still faithful, God is on your side.

Yes, we do live in a changing world as did St. Paul. But in the midst of his changing world, Paul discovered that God was on his side because God was in him, God forgave him, and God was faithful. Whoever you are this morning, whatever your needs might be, whatever burden you bear or problem you have, you can count on God--He is on your side. The hymn writer wrote, "Change and decay in all around I see, O thou who changest not, abide with me" Whatever your needs this morning, God is reaching out to you. Whatever your needs, God is on your side. The only question left is this: Whose side are you on?