

Superman had Lex Luther and kryptonite. Luke Skywalker had Darth Vader. Batman had the Joker. Whom do you have against you? What do you have against you?

“If God is for us, who can be against us!?” “If God is for us.” Do you ever struggle with that little word “if”? I know I have. Why would Paul, why would the Holy Spirit put that little word “if” in there? For some people, that little word “if” is like a little pebble in their shoe; as little as the pebble is, it bothers them big time, it affects the way they step and walk with God. I’m told that we could translate that little word “if” as “since.” “Since God is for us” sounds better, doesn’t it? And it’s true! But Paul and the Holy Spirit had a word they could have used that clearly means “since” instead of “if.” If they wanted to clearly say “since,” they could have. Instead, they chose the word that means “if.” Why? So we stop and think. So that we stop and think about how God is for us. If Paul would have simply said: “Since God is for us” it would be so easy to hear it and just move on. Instead, Paul wants us to think about our relationship with God, to think about “God for us.”

And so we wonder: “How do I know if God is for me?”

When you wonder, where is the first place you look for reassurance that God is for you?

What voices do you have in your life terrorizing you with the thought that God is NOT with you or for you?

We could look in us and around us and see how well life is going for us, at how well God is taking care of us. We could, but Paul hardly ever points us to how well our life is going for us as proof of “God for us.” Paul was living a hard life in a dark and dying world, and as a Christian, he was living a persecuted life. And on top of that, or better underneath all that, Paul had this hurt and heartache - no matter how hard he tries to live right, he keeps on doing evil. Paul didn’t try to sugar-coat his sin - he did evil; it hurt; and it had him crying out: “**What a wretch I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?!**” Paul knew the same would be true for us - that in this dark and dying world, life is hard for us; that as Christians we are being attacked and persecuted for speaking up and living our faith. And even as Christians, or maybe especially as Christians, we would have a hurt and heartache inside us caused by our sin. With all that, Paul knew that looking around at life in this world, it can be easier to feel God against us, than God for us.

So “How can you know that God is for you?” Look to Jesus. Look to Jesus on the cross. In Romans 1,3,4,5,6,7,8 - Paul points us to Jesus without any “ifs.”

Read through those chapters and pick a favorite verse pointing you to Jesus for you!

For example, without any “ifs” Paul says: **“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** Look to Jesus on the cross and see your sins paid for. Look to Jesus on the cross and hear what that means for you: **“There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.”** Look to Jesus on the cross and see “God for you.” And know this - that same Jesus is now alive and well in heaven for you. He’s not dead, done, and out of the picture. Think of Easter and Ascension Day. God raised Jesus back to life and took him home to heaven, not as a failure that he’s hiding in the back corner of heaven. No, God raised Jesus back to life, took him home to heaven, and seated him at his right hand - to show **“there is now no condemnation”** for Jesus and **“no condemnation”** with Jesus. For your sin, for my guilt, for the sin and guilt of the world - on the cross Jesus paid, and on Easter the Father announced his verdict - “Paid in full; forgiven in full.” Now, today you have that same Jesus who died for you seated at God’s right hand for you. The Father seated him there right next to him - to speak up for you and to look out for you. As much as your conscience might accuse you and condemn you, that “God must be against you”; as much as Satan might try to accuse you before God, Jesus is at God’s right hand in heaven and he is speaking up for you - grace, mercy, and peace for you. So if you want to know how you can know that God is for you - look to Jesus, listen to Jesus, relax in Jesus.

How does Paul show that the Father is more interested in hearing Jesus speak up for you than hearing Satan accuse you?

If God is for us - and we know he is - who can be against us? When Paul says that - **“who can be against us?”** we might expect Paul to show God flexing his muscles bigger and stronger than anyone and anything against us. Instead, Paul shows how God has flexed his love for us. How? With Jesus! With Jesus at the cross for us! With Jesus in heaven for us! Listen to Paul: **“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand**

of God and is also interceding for us.” You have Jesus speaking up for you. You have Jesus looking out for you. And nothing - no one and no thing - can separate you from the love of Jesus.

It doesn't always look that way, does it? Paul knows that. He knew what he had faced; he knew what the Romans would face as Christians - hardship and persecution, famine and nakedness, danger and sword. Paul knew what the Romans could expect, and what we can expect - not just the hard life of living in a hard world, but the hard life of living in a world dead-set against Christ - and dead-set against you because you follow Christ. Paul was living that life. And, sometimes more, sometimes less, we live that life.

What do we do with that life? Sometimes we run; sometimes we hide; sometimes we play it safe. Forgive us, Lord!

How might you be running, hiding, playing it safe?

What do we get to do with that life? We get to join Paul: **“If God is for us, who can be against us?”** We have God for us and that means we have heaven ahead of us!” What about all the troubles of this life? What about all the world that is against us? Paul answers: **“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”** “More than conquerors,” super-conquerors. Not just super-heroes with some super-hero power, but super-conquerors with Jesus Christ. **“For I am convinced that neither death nor life [sometimes it's hard to know which is worse], neither angels [good or bad] nor rulers [not all the politics or politicians, not all the governors or governments in the world], neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth [nothing from above, nothing from below], nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** What was that? With Jesus, there is nothing in all creation that is able to separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus your Lord.

Which of the powers at work against you, are NOT listed by Paul?

What do we do with that? We thank God. And we live like winners. In the face of temptation, we live like winners. In the face of trouble, we live like winners. In the face of hurt and heart-ache, we live like winners. In the face of disappointment and frustration, we live like winners. In the face of opposition and persecution, we live like winners. And, finally, every day, in the face of death and dying, we live like winners. How? Why? **“There is nothing in all creation that**

can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” And, let’s hear it again - “If God is for us, who can be against us?!” Amen.

How will you live as a super-conqueror this week? Thinking of our choir’s first song in our service, what will your battle-cry be? Hint - four letters, rhymes with dove (the bird)

St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church

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DIVINE SERVICE II

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... so much seems to be unraveling around us and turning against us.

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we look forward knowing this -
"If God is for us, who can be against us?!"

OPENING HYMN

"Crown Him with Many Crowns"

Hymn 341

Crown him with many crowns, The Lamb upon his throne;
Hark how the heav'nly anthem drowns All music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing Of him who died for thee,
And hail him as thy matchless King Through all eternity.

Crown him the Lord of love -- Behold his hands and side,
Rich wounds, yet visible above, In beauty glorified.
No angel in the sky Can fully bear that sight,
But downward bends his wond'ring eye At mysteries so bright.

Crown him the Lord of life, Who triumphed o'er the grave
And rose victorious in the strife For those he came to save.
His glories now we sing Who died and rose on high,
Who died eternal life to bring And lives that death may die.

Crown him the Lord of heav'n, Enthroned in worlds above;
Crown him the King to whom is giv'n The wondrous name of Love.
Crown him with many crowns As thrones before him fall;
Crown him, ye kings, with many crowns For he is King of all.

INVOCATION

M: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

CONFESSION

M: Dear friends, let us approach God with a true heart and confess our sins, asking him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to forgive us.

C: **Lord of life, I confess that I am by nature dead in sin.**
For faithless worrying and selfish pride,
For sins of habit and sins of choice,
For the evil I have done and the good I have failed to do,
I deserve to be cast away from your presence forever.
O Lord, I am sorry for my sins. Forgive me, for Jesus' sake.

ABSOLUTION

M: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. In his great mercy, God made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in our sins. Hear the word of Christ through his called servant: I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

LORD, HAVE MERCY (*Kyrie*)

M: In peace, let us pray to the Lord.
For the well-being of all people everywhere, that they may receive from you all they need to sustain body and life, hear our prayer, O Lord.

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

M: For the spread of your life-giving gospel throughout the world, that all who are lost in sin may be brought to faith in you, hear our prayer, O Christ.

C: **Christ, have mercy.**

M: For patience and perseverance in this life, that we may not lose the hope of heaven as we await your return, hear our prayer, O Lord.

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

M: Lord of life, live in us that we may live for you.

C: **Amen.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord Jesus Christ, by your victory you have broken the power of the evil one. Fill our hearts with joy and peace as we look with hope to that day when every creature in heaven and earth will acclaim you King of kings and Lord of lords to your unending praise and glory; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

FIRST LESSON

Romans 8:31-39

What, then, shall we say in response to this? 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, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

CHOIR

“O Church Arise”

*O church, arise and put your armor on
Hear the call of Christ our captain
For now the weak can say that they are strong
In the strength that God has given
With shield of faith and belt of truth
We'll stand against the devil's lies...*

*An army bold whose battle cry is "Love"
Reaching out to those in darkness*

*Our call to war, to love the captive soul
But to rage against the captor
And with the sword that makes the wounded whole
We will fight with faith and valor
When faced with trials on ev'ry side
We know the outcome is secure
And Christ will have the prize for which He died
An inheritance of nations*

*Oh Church, Arise Oh Church Arise
Come, see the cross where love and mercy meet
As the Son of God is stricken
Then see His foes lie crushed beneath His feet
For the Conqueror has risen
And as the stone is rolled away
And Christ emerges from the grave
This vict'ry march continues till the day
Ev'ry eye and heart shall see Him*

*So Spirit, come, put strength in ev'ry stride
Give grace for ev'ry hurdle
That we may run with faith to win the prize
Of a servant good and faithful
As saints of old still line the way
Retelling triumphs of His grace
We hear their calls and hunger for the day
When, with Christ, we stand in glory
Oh Church, Arise Oh Church Arise*

VERSE OF THE DAY

Alleluia. I am the Alpha and the Omega,
the First and the Last,
the Beginning and the End. Alleluia.
(Revelation 22:13)

GOSPEL LESSON

John 18:33-37

Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him,
“Are you the king of the Jews?”

“Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?”

“Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “It was your people and your chief priests
who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”

Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would
fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from
another place.”

“You are a king, then!” said Pilate.

Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason
I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.
Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

HYMN

“The Head that Once Was Crowned”

Hymn 217

The head that once was crowned with thorns Is crowned with glory now;
A royal diadem adorns The mighty victor’s brow.

The highest place that heav’n affords Is his, is his by right,
The King of kings and Lord of lords And heav’n’s eternal light.

The joy of all who dwell above, The joy of all below
To whom he manifests his love And grants his name to know.

To them the cross, with all its shame, With all its grace, is giv’n;
Their name, an everlasting name; Their joy, the joy of heav’n.

They suffer with their Lord below; They reign with him above,
Their profit and their joy, to know The myst'ry of his love.

The cross he bore is life and health, Though shame and death to him;
His people's hope, his people's wealth, Their everlasting theme.

SERMON

NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and became fully human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE SACRAMENT

(Guests, please see our communion practice on page 2.)

(Individually packaged wafers are gluten-free.)

(Before and after Communion prayers are found in *Christian Worship*, page 11.)

M: The Lord be with you.

C: **(Spoken) And also with you.**

M: Lift up your hearts.

C: **We lift them up unto the Lord.**

M: Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

C: **It is good and right so to do.**

M: It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who rose from the dead in glorious triumph to bring forgiveness to the world and everlasting life to all who believe.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

M: Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my † body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my † blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

M: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: Amen.

LAMB OF GOD

Agnus Dei

Lamb of God, you take a - way the
sin of the world; have mer - cy on us.
Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the
world; have mer - cy on us. Lamb of God,
you take a - way the sin of the world;
grant us your peace. A - men.

DISTRIBUTION - CHOIR

"Christ the Sure and Steady Anchor"

*Christ the sure and steady anchor,
In the fury of the storm;
When the winds of doubt blow through me,
And my sails have all been torn.
In the suffering, in the sorrow, ...*

*When my sinking hopes are few;
I will hold fast to the anchor,
It will never be removed.*

*Christ the sure and steady anchor,
While the tempest rages on;
When temptation claims the battle,
And it seems the night has won.
Deeper still then goes the anchor,
Though I justly stand accused;
I will hold fast to the anchor,
It shall never be removed.*

*Christ the sure and steady anchor,
Through the floods of unbelief;
Hopeless somehow, O my soul, now,
Lift your eyes to Calvary.
This my ballast of assurance,
See his love forever proved.
I will hold fast to the anchor,
It will never be removed.*

*Christ the sure and steady anchor,
As we face the wave of death;
When these trials give way to glory,
As we draw our final breath.
We will cross that great horizon,
Clouds behind and life secure;
And the calm will be the better,
For the storms that we endure.*

*Christ the sure of our salvation,
Ever faithful, ever true!
We will hold fast to the anchor,
It shall never be removed.*

CLOSING PRAYER

M: We give you thanks, O Lord, for the foretaste of the heavenly banquet that you have given us to eat and to drink in this sacrament. Through this gift you have fed our faith, nourished our hope, and strengthened our love. By your Spirit help us to live as your holy people until that day when you will receive us as your guests at the wedding supper of the Lamb, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

BLESSING

M: The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.
The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN

"Beautiful Savior"
Hymn 369

Beautiful Savior, King of creation,
Son of God and Son of Man! Truly I'd love thee,
Truly I'd serve thee, Light of my soul, my Joy, my Crown.

Fair are the meadows, Fair are the woodlands,
Robed in flow'rs of blooming spring; Jesus is fairer,
Jesus is purer; He makes our sorr'wing spirit sing.

Fair is the sunshine, Fair is the moonlight,
Bright the sparkling stars on high; Jesus shines brighter,
Jesus shines purer, Than all the angels in the sky.

Beautiful Savior, Lord of the nations,
Son of God and Son of Man! Glory and honor,
Praise, adoration, Now and forevermore be thine!

OFFERING

*If you prefer online giving, you may scan
this code with your mobile device.*



ALPHA AND OMEGA

He is the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. That sounds neat, doesn't it? What does it mean? In a sense, it's all about Christ!

So what do we do? As we close out the year, we do some Alpha and Omega figuring with our offerings. In our house, Lisa makes sure that every year and every month, Christ and his work get the first checks. I get to make sure that Christ and his work get the last checks.

For the first checks, we do our budget, looking at how it seems God will bless us in the new year. After we project our income, we figure our base offerings - xx% times income. With God's promise and our plan we're set to think of our offerings as blessings instead of squeezings.

For our last checks, we look over the past year, at God's giving and our giving. We see: God's been good! We see: we get to do some extra thanksgiving! (And maybe a little bit of catch-up.) We look at Christ's ministry and our ministry - "wouldn't it be great to support _____?!"

Alpha and Omega! First checks and last checks - it's all about Christ!

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