

Christ Episcopal Church | Valdosta, GA
Sermon | July 26, 2026
Ms. Molly Stevenson

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Good morning!

This week's readings are RICH! So rich, in fact, that I had a hard time landing on a single point. I was tempted to do what I heard a preacher once did on Easter, where he stood up in the pulpit and leaned into the microphone and said, "It's all true!" and then sat back down. Alas, I'm not doing that, but that's how profound today's readings are to me. So, that being said, may the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

The readings are full of the promise of God's unconditional, inseparable love for each of us. We are chosen. We are beloved. We are pursued. We are called. And we are not alone - even if sometimes we feel we are.

In today's Epistle, we are encouraged and reminded of the security we have through Christ, that we are guided by the Holy Spirit, and that we are eternally and unbreakably loved by God.

Such good news is hard to fathom. I'm sure each of us have had times in our lives when we have felt so incredibly alone or lost, like it was you or me against the world, that it was hard to believe and hope in that promise. I know I have. Times when we didn't know which direction to turn, or even how to cry out for help.

We are reminded in Paul's letter to the Romans that even in our weakness and inability to pray, The Holy Spirit helps us and intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And then he says, and God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit. And if that isn't encouraging enough, not only does the Holy Spirit intercede for us, but Christ Jesus, who is at the right hand of God, intercedes for us! We've definitely got the A-Team pulling for us!

God searches the heart because he wants us to know He is that close to us. So close, in fact, that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As most of you know, music is important to me. Most of the scripture I can fairly easily quote is a result of having sung the words in various anthems and hymns. And, you know, they say those who sing pray twice. But, occasionally, a passage in scripture will call to mind a song that I didn't sing in church. This week's Epistle did that. Most of you of a certain age, and others of you who got a steady diet of Motown hits from your parents, like my kids did, will remember the song from the 60's sung by Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell and later by Diana Ross –

Ain't No mountain High Enough.

Ain't no mountain high enough
Ain't no valley low enough
Ain't no river wide enough
To keep me from you
No wind, no rain, nor winter's cold can stop me....

Nothing! Not hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword, or addiction, or..... you fill in the blank. 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.

This is not to say that hardships and struggles won't occur. They have and they will again. But it's the promise that in the midst of things we can't control or understand, when we don't know how to talk to God, in spite of all this, everything will work together for good for those who love God. This is assurance of our Salvation. Everything WILL.... Future tense. This is pointing to the hope we have in the Resurrection. The new life we have with Christ for eternity. Present hardships are temporary compared to the glory to come. We prayed in today's Collect, that God would "increase and multiply upon us His mercy, that we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal." The Kingdom of heaven.

Everything WILL work together for good for those who love God. This is GOOD NEWS! But it might be hard to believe...especially in a society where most of our relationships and interactions are transactional, competitive, and with conditions. Unconditional love is not a concept known or practiced by many. We're taught if it sounds too good to be true, it's probably too good to be true. But THIS Good News IS true! We are His children, He loves us, and nothing can keep him from getting to us.

Not a part of our readings today, but Jeremiah 1:5 helps my understanding of how much God loves me (and you), and for how long: "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born I set you apart." Some translations say "Before you were formed in the womb, I CHOSE you, or I CONSECRATED you." Each of us was "predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son....and those he predestined, he also called...."

It feels good to be called, to be chosen. Remember that feeling in elementary school when teams were picked? There were two "captains" who would take turns choosing people for their teams. That was angst producing. I was never a top athlete, nor chosen first. It didn't occur to me that in the end everyone would be chosen. Thankfully, we've all already been chosen and assured of our belovedness and being wanted. We've been picked for God's team. If God is for us, who can be against us?

This calls to mind another song. This one is a Honey Creek Song. It's called God Is For Us.

The refrain goes:

God is for us, who can be against us
God is for us we are not alone.

The first verse is:

You are there when it seems no ones' around,
Always reaching out your hand to show the way
Just when I begin to think that my load's too much to bear,
You come remind me that you'll take it away.

And the final verse is:

You are there with your arms nailed to the cross,
Slowly dying for the ones you came to love.
By your death you have saved me, by your wounds I am healed,
The perfect sacrifice sent from the Lord above.
God is for us, who can be against us?
God is for us. We are not alone.

What a beautiful reminder.

"He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?"

Like Paul, 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.

Amen.