

Text: Romans 8:31-39 (Lent 1, Series B, February 21, 2021)

Theme: Lent Aware.

Virtue (basic truth): By God's grace, we get to go through Lent aware of his love for us.

Malady (our problem): In the fog of life, sinners often fail to remember God is for us.

Telic Note (goal): By means of this sermon, the Spirit blesses us to see just how wonderfully God is "for us" even when things appear otherwise.

Propositional Statement (aim): Fogged by a sin, we fail to recognize God's love for us in every way. But hasn't failed us. His love hasn't failed us. Instead, in gracious power and powerful grace, he strengthens us in the truth of his cross and blesses us to *lent aware*.

Specific Law in Text: implied in our short-sighted dealings with life's hardships.

Specific Gospel in Text: "If God is for us, who can be against us" (Romans 8:31)?

Doctrinal Thought: *God for us* isn't just kind feelings, it's his characteristic and activity!

Sanctification Thought: *"LORD God, in such faithful love and in such patient grace, you are bold to remind me that you are for me in every way. For all that you've done for me. For all that you've given me. For all that you've promised me. For all that you are for me. Thank you! Hear me as I smile to pray in Jesus' name. Amen!"*

Romans 8:31-39

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² 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? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. 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. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

"For your sake we face death all day long;

we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."^[a]

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,^[b] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ 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.

Simple gospel truth, eternal gospel confidence: “*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ*” (Romans 1:6). Amen!

Turns out Florida is “February foggy,” too. That’s not just a connection to the Friday-past front that brought rain, cool and clouds – although, fits nicely. More so, the *February fog* connotation connects to the observation that – even here in the sunshine state – this time of year is just a bit hazed and it takes a bit more to get going. It’s not awful; not evil. It’s the season and we’re used to it. Daylight is dim. Snooze bar allures. Extra cup of coffee calls. Same length of days, same daily tasks but, somehow, it takes a bit more effort to pay attention, stay aware, and endure it all.

And, I suppose, if we think about it for more than a minute, concept connects to spiritual lives, too. It’s *Lent* where we’re supposed to be hyper aware of our sins. And we are; but some we’re just tired of dealing, others we’re tired of struggling against – energy wanes. Some sins we’ve dealt with for years and a worn spiritual life shows it; others are sins of recent weathering – and our spiritual lives show them, too. After a while, even for Christians, spiritual fog settles in that says they’re not that bad or God doesn’t mind. In time and in that mindset, a spiritual tiredness sets in that forgets our God is a God of his Word and he’s serious about it. Pair that with all that goes on in our hearts and homes, church and community, and despair causes us to question, causes us to be just a little less attentive to our spiritual needs, a bit groggy about spiritual care.

Maybe, most strange of all in that mindset, is the temptation to neglect what God says in his Word – but that’s like going without sleep in an already ominous season. Or, the temptation is to supplement what he has to say with things foreign to his grace, and with alternate mindsets. And you know from your past experiences how all that turns out. Ignorance isn’t bliss.

But, divine advice in all of it – whether today is a bright day of grace, or whether it’s a bit foggy – is actually relatively and graciously simple. In all of it, God’s heart instructs the simple: ***Lent aware***. And, by the Spirit’s grace today, that’s what we learn from Paul’s words in Romans 8.

Two quick things before we expound on that.

- 1) Normally, *Lent* isn’t a verb. In fact, *Lent* comes from a word that means *lengthen* and seems to be in reference to longer days as Spring nears. Inside Christianity, though, *Lent* is synonymous with the 40 days before Easter where hearts are confronted more immediately with our sin’s reality and consequence, but where we see God’s Solution clearly and are strengthened to “*repent and believe the good news*” (Mk. 1:15).

As our sermon-theme-verb, then, we’ll think of it as our whole pre-Easter spiritual activity and focus. Yes, *recognition and repentance*; also *rejuvenation and rejoicing*.

- 2) Intentionally, I'll save the reading of the text as the last thing. That's not the normal way, and I'm confident my sermon-writing-professors would roll their eyes at it. But the goal with it is to let the confidence of "*God for us*" ready our hearts so we delight even more in his Word, and then respond with a prayer God strengthen us in grace.

First thing that *Lent Aware* helps us recognize is the glad reality *God is for us*. When I say that, I get to tell you something that, except for the Bible, no other place can even speak of it. But "*for us*" isn't just something nice to think about when things are hard, or something to captivate minds when the day is hazy. It's even way more than God having some kind feelings toward us

Instead, by his own heart, volition, and activity, "*God for us*" is a gospel reality with perplexing proof that, so much does he have our interest in mind, he took activity to show it; and so great is his activity that he hasn't withheld anything necessary from us. To the degree that when, for our own sins, it came to sacrificing his own Son, he did. He did. Not that we earned it. Not that we deserved it. Not that we, in sin, even desired it. But God, in his heart of grace, saw our need and situation and he gave him on our behalf freely as a gift to us (Romans 8:32 literal paraphrase).

That clear, that Son in focus, *Lent Aware* builds on the reality that "*God for us*" is most clearly on display in "*God's Son for us*." There's our Jesus! Please never forget that. In fact, not only "please don't forget that," but "please don't forget to dig deeply into that." Every day, and especially at Lent, ponder the depth of his activity for you. He lived. He died. He rose. He ascended. And the result of that activity: he has won you, has declared you innocent, has justified you, has redeemed you, has saved you. Those verbs are all intentionally past tense; each display the good-news-fact, gospel-reality we get to go back to whenever our past haunts us, whenever this life hazes over God's hand, and whenever Satan and selves stand to accuse us.

Again, the moment they do, *Lent Aware* at what the *Son of God for us* still is and does *for us*. Whenever Satan stands to accuse, Jesus stands to silence him. Whenever our sins haunt, his sacrifice hushes. Whenever the day is intense, we have a *God for us* who intercedes – who puts our case before the Father's throne and who there, in resurrected victory and confidence, appeals: "*he is my brother – and I paid for his sins; she is my sister – and I won her salvation; they are innocent because I have conquered; they are redeemed because I paid the price!*" And, friends, that's true on the days it's easy to see his grace ... and on the days it's not.

And we've got those days too. I do. You know I do. You do. I know you do. Because we still very much live as sinners in a sin-consequenced world; and because God has never promised us the fullness of heavenly bliss on this side of eternity. And we know that. But even in all that, God blesses us to be *Lent aware* in his love for each and everyone of us. And we get to see that, too.

Remember, focus of *Lent* is – always will be – on Christ’s love for us on display in his cross. He loved us enough to live for us, to die for us, to rise for us. And he loves us still! And, *Lent aware*, in the strength of his promise, there is nothing that can undo his love for us, or take away from us – because it’s not even our love for him that’s the focus of our hope or the strength of our confidence. It’s always, always, always, his love *for us*. That’s what *Lent aware* thinks about, goes back to, takes comfort in. Him for us. Because, in that love, he draws us to himself, he unites us to himself; and in that love he calls you one who has “*more than conquered*” and “*completely prevailed*” – and by grace, that is exactly what you are! Even when that’s not the easiest thing to see. Even when daily experience hints at the otherwise. Even when fog hides it.

But even then – and especially then! – you get to be *Lent aware* of *God is for us*, of *God’s Son for us*, and of *God’s love for us*. And most beautifully of all, you don’t have to take my word for it. You can take him at his! From Romans chapter 8:

“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² 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? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. 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. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ 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” (Romans 8:31-39).

To that, I can simply say: Amen!