**Sermon for 26 July. Romans 8:26-end**

Over the last 2 weeks, we have been looking at Roman chapter 8, and this week we conclude this extraordinary chapter.

Week 1 we thought about being set free from condemnation

Week 2 we thought about 2 themes:

* being adopted into God’s family.
* and how the interconnectedness of things – even creation is creaking and broken, waiting for restoration.

This week we heard a passage which featured 3 distinct, but related themes

**Lost for words**

First of all, Paul says that the Spirit who has given us so much also assists us deeply and intimately.

So often we don’t know what to say in prayer – and Jesus’ disciples asked him to teach them to pray. If you’re lost for words praying, the Holy Spirit helps us, encourages, gives us the words, and enables us to pray beyond words.

If you’ve ever been involved with helping a small child with words, you’ll know what I mean. Perhaps you’ve seen an adult listening to a small child reading and mouthing the words as they do so, egging them on. Or perhaps you’ve seen a parent urging their child on at a nativity play, and living the part for them. But in both cases, the child still has to articulate the words for themselves, even if the adult is working really hard for them. I think that’s the image here. We’re not just puppets, but the Spirit enables us to do what we want to do for ourselves, but can’t manage. And he helps us say things we want to say, but don’t know how.

Some think it is a reference to the gift of tongues – a language that we do not know, but which helps us express these feelings. Others might point to the gift of silent prayer, which is also beyond words, and can often be a very profound way of expressing our hopes, fears, concerns and desires.

**Predestined**

Predestined can sound very fatalistic – your life is on this set of rails, and God is working the points – a kind of divine train set. Or it can sound like God is micromanaging our lives, and we have no real control. Any decision making we think we do would be an illusion, if that were true. Or it can sound very unjust. Are people really predestined to situations such as famine, suffering, oppression, concentration camps? Is that inevitable?

I think some of this arises from a misunderstanding of the word in the original language. Gk: Pro-orizo. It’s related to our word horizon. I don’t think it’s about specific decisions, or about detail, or even about who’s in and who’s out in eternity; it’s about the setting and landscape we are given for possibilities. And we know already from Paul earlier in Roman that he is fully aware that we have total capacity to make choices that go for or against God’s will - and that we can make choices that through our connectedness have impact on others.

Our *purpose* is to know God. This isn’t like some arbitrary selection of teams like we used to have in for schoolyard games, where some get picked, and others get left behind for some arbitrary reason. God has set a horizon for us to know him, but we still have to cooperate to bring that about.

And a word about the “all things work for good” line. That doesn’t mean that the bad things that happen to us are somehow completely compensated for (or justified) by a later outcome. It simply means that God can redeem and restore us, wherever we might find ourselves. Nothing is beyond the reach of his saving love.

*Which brings us on to…*

**Nothing can separate us.**

The thrust of this whole chapter has been confidence in God’s saving grace. That his love can triumph. There is no condemnation. We are family, and not just people with a membership of a club that can be cancelled at a whim. And this experience of redemption is a corporate experience, connected to one another and even to creation. And here at the end of the chapter, Paul again affirms that our status as God’s children cannot be robbed from us. As Paul puts it, who can bring any charge? Jesus already knows what they all are. He is the one who could condemn, but doesn’t; he intercedes for us. He speaks for us, and represents us (using Paul’s courtroom image), broken, fallen, sinful, guilty as we are.

Can anything else take our adoption as God’s children away? Famine, sword? No. Paul gives a comprehensive list – death life, spiritual powers, the present and future; nothing can separate us from the love of God.

When we looked at verse 1, we asked what was the therefore there for? Here Paul concludes his explanation.

So many Christians live their lives under a kind of condemnation – never feeling they’ve done enough, haunted by an enduring spiritual guilt. Of course there are times in our life when we feel guilty – and we probably should. But we’re not taking God’s grace seriously, nor his promise of forgiveness if we fail – or perhaps refuse – to put that guilt down.

Chapter 8 starts with “There is no condemnation”. It finishes with “Who can separate us from the love of God?”

May be free from false guilt and condemnation. May we be assured and confident that we are part of God’s family, and may we know that nothing – *nothing* can separate us from his love.

Amen.