

SERMON

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READING: Romans 8: 1-4, 12-17, 31-39

There is a meditation often read at funerals that begins with the line, "Death is nothing at all." That is not true. Death is real. It wrenches from us those whom we love and tears at our hearts, for death means that we will not see or touch or hear them anymore. Death is not nothing. It brings grief and tears and rearranges our lives in ways that are not easy to endure.

In the face of death, therefore, we are not unaffected but stand before it as people in need — in need of God, in need of one who has passed through death and can intercede for us in our loss, in our grief and in our uncertainties about how to go on without the one upon whose love we have relied.

It was one of the great themes of James Torrance's life — that he never grew weary of proclaiming — that intercession is offered for us. There is one who intercedes, who takes our grief, our uncertainties, our inadequate praise, who helps us in our weakness and takes us to the Father's heart. Romans 8 from which we have read this morning testifies to that. "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? . . . It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us." And earlier: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words."

There are times in our lives when the inadequacy of our own prayer and the limits of our own resources become starkly apparent. Bereavement can be one of those times. But precisely at such times God in his grace can make us profoundly aware that we are upheld — upheld by the prayers of others, upheld by his church, upheld above all by his Word and Spirit. So when in our sorrow we can only utter the words "my Lord" and hope, that hope is well founded. He who did not withhold his Son, will he not also give us everything else?



Paul concludes his great chapter in Romans with the well known words, "For 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." — Not death! Not even death can separate us from the love of God. For all the apparent finality of death, for all that it leaves us stricken with grief, it is not the last word. There is yet the Word of God: "I am the resurrection and the life. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. See, I am making all things new." With that promise we may look forward to the day when every tear will be wiped from our eyes, when death will be no more, when mourning and crying and pain will be no more, and we will receive in all its fullness the gift of participation through the Spirit in the Son's communion with the Father.

For I am convinced, says Paul, that death will not separate us from the love of God in Jesus our Lord. In that confidence and in that faith, let us today know not only sorrow, but also thanksgiving and hope. Amen.