

You probably noticed that my sermon title is: “Nothing.” You may have even thought: *What kind of a title is that for an Easter sermon?* Could it just be a clerical error? No, not with my secretaries! Then, worse yet, could it be that the skeptics have finally gotten to me, finally undermined my belief in the Easter miracle? No, absolutely not! Actually, the title grew out of a conversation I had some weeks ago at the Hospice House with Michael Ann Nelson. Her long battle with cancer had left her very weak, but that day she felt good enough to talk a bit, so we did. I shared the words of Romans 8 – how nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God. Then, not knowing this was one of her favorite verses, I said, “You do believe this, Michael Ann?” Her eyes lit up. “Oh yes!” she exclaimed. “Nothing, nothing, nothing, will be able to separate me from the love of God!” She wasn’t up to much more than that, so I prayed for her and took my leave. But her passion, her certainty, will always stay with me: *“Nothing, nothing, nothing, will be able to separate me from the love of God!”*

And you know what? Nothing will! Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God, either. That is the assurance we have as followers of the Risen Lord. That is the assurance Jesus gives us as He guides us through this life to the next. So that is why I have chosen Romans 8 for my text this Easter morning: ***“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.”*** [Please join me in prayer...]

Okay, *“nothing, nothing, nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God!”* But now, why exactly do we believe this? And what makes us so sure it’s true? The short answer is “Easter,” isn’t it? What happened on Easter. Jesus’ resurrection victory and what it means makes us sure that *“nothing, nothing, nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God!”*

How so? Well, think back to the first Easter morning. When the women went to the tomb, they were expecting to find something, weren’t they? Something sad. Something painful. Something tragic. They were expecting to find a body tucked away in a sealed and guarded tomb. In fact, they were expecting to complete Jesus’ burial arrangements. Yes, that’s what they expected. But when they got there, what did they find? Nothing! The stone was rolled away. The tomb was empty. The body was gone. Instead of something, they found nothing!

Thank God! For as they soon realized, this “nothing” meant a miracle had taken place. This “nothing” meant that Jesus had risen from the dead. And as a result, finding nothing meant everything in the world! Remember: the powers that be had done their worst to Jesus. They had condemned Him, abused Him, killed Him, then buried Him in a cold, dark tomb. *That’s that!* they thought. *No more of His bogus claims or promises!* But God wasn’t about to let that be that. God

wasn't about to let the truth stay buried. So on Easter morning, God showed the world what's what! By raising Jesus, God backed up Jesus' claims. He is the Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior of the world. And by raising Jesus, God backed up Jesus' promises. He can offer forgiveness and eternal life to all who believe in Him. I mean, God would not have vindicated a lie. God would not have vindicated a half-truth. So by raising Jesus, God showed the world that everything Jesus claimed, everything Jesus promised, was true! And God did this in a way that made this point absolutely clear.

You see, in the run-up to the Easter, Jesus had not only told His disciples that He would suffer, die, and rise again; He had told them what His resurrection would mean. The day before He died, Jesus had told them: **"Because I live, you will live also."** Now, what could this mean but that if He were to die, then live again, that would be the proof that when they died, they would live again? That was Jesus' claim: **"I am the resurrection and the life."** That was Jesus' promise: **"Whoever believes in Me, though they die, yet shall they live."** So when Jesus died, the stakes were very clear. One way or another, His followers would know whether He'd told the truth. Then the verdict came on Easter morning – when nothing was found in the tomb...because Jesus was risen! And the good news for the disciples is the good news we hold onto today. Jesus does live! Therefore, we will live also! Nothing was found in the tomb, therefore, **nothing, nothing, nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God!"**

*Alright, we say, that's the short answer. But is it really the full answer? Does the resurrection alone guarantee our salvation? Well, actually, no. The Easter miracle proves that Jesus is our Savior, but what guarantees our salvation is what happened on Good Friday: Jesus' suffering and death on the cross. As He was nailed to that cross, Jesus took upon Himself every sin that ever was, is, or will be. As Jesus bled and died, He suffered the punishment for every sin that ever was, is, or will be. And that is what guarantees us forgiveness – Jesus making full atonement for our sins on the cross. That is what guarantees us eternal life – Jesus dying in our place on the cross. Jesus left nothing undone. Nothing! And really, that is the reason why *"nothing, nothing, nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God!"**

A few weeks ago, this truth really came home to our Confirmation kids. We were up on a retreat, and for our evening devotions, we had them write their sins on a piece of paper and fold it up. Then they received absolution and threw the paper in the fire. That was to symbolize that their sins were gone and forgiven forever. Well, as this was going on, Corey Smith, our youth minister, noticed that some of the kids were watching the fire very closely. Apparently, they wanted to be sure their list of sins got completely burned up! So, knowing how kids think, Corey assured them: *"Don't worry! If anything doesn't get burned up, it's not like God is going snatch it out of the ashes and say, 'Look what I've got to hold against you!' Those sins were paid in full 2,000 years ago when Jesus died for you on the cross. Kids, you are forgiven!"*

That's something we want to remember as well! Sad to say, many Christians carry around such terrible burdens of guilt! Unnecessarily! In fact, many Christians pray over and over about the same old sin. Unnecessarily! "Lord, forgive me. Please forgive me. I hope You'll forgive me...forgive me...forgive me!" For years this can go on! Unnecessarily! Because guess what? Forgiveness is already a done deal. It was a done deal 2,000 years ago when Jesus died for our sins on the cross. God doesn't have to think about whether or not to forgive us. He does! And guess what? God hears us the first time we ask. There's no need to keep asking and asking Him to forgive the same old sin. **"If we confess our sins, He will be faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** Sure, we may still feel terrible about what we did. That's to be expected. But how we feel is not what ultimately matters. What Jesus did for us on the cross is what matters. What God says the cross means is what matters! And whether we believe it is what matters. God says: **"You are forgiven."** So believe it! There are no ifs, ands, or buts about it. If God says you are forgiven, you are forgiven! Out of all the billions times trillions of sins Jesus paid for, God did not snatch your worst one off the cross and say, *"Look what I've got to hold against you!"* Even if it was the worst sin imaginable – the absolute worst! – that sin was paid in full along with all the rest. Remember, Jesus left nothing undone. Nothing! **"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins"** – for all our sins! – **"and not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world."** No, on the cross Jesus left nothing undone, and that is why *"nothing, nothing, nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God!"*

A few days after Michael Ann Nelson spoke these words, she departed this life. Or perhaps I should say she entered that life which is life indeed – the eternal life prepared for her in heaven. She breathed her last breath here, then opened her eyes to unimaginable splendor. Her suffering was over. Her new self was immortal, her soul overflowing with peace and joy. Long-departed loved ones gathered around her. Jesus Himself welcomed her home – home to a life of infinite fulfillment, a life of perfect delight! How do I know this? Because I saw her faith. And because I know God's grace. And because nothing else is required for salvation. Nothing!

So you see why I chose "Nothing" for my sermon title! You've probably never heard a preacher say, "I hope you take home 'nothing' from my sermon." I have never said that before and never will again. But as you celebrate the good news of Easter, that's exactly what I'd like you to take home...and thank God for: all the hope and assurance there is in this little word "nothing." Jesus left "nothing" undone when He paid for our salvation on the cross. God left "nothing" in the tomb to show us Jesus' promise to us is true. And if we believe in Jesus, "nothing" more is required for salvation. That is why we can know and trust and be certain 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"*** – *nothing, nothing, nothing!* – ***"will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** Amen.

