

No-Thing Can Separate Us
Romans 8:26-39

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This morning I would like to introduce you to the new General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Rev. Terry Hord Owens. She was just elected at our latest General Assembly in Indianapolis. This is an excerpt from her message at the Assembly **[Video]**.

Nothing can separate us. The focus of her message was essentially one of unity; nothing can separate us from one another. Of the many church-dividing, family-dividing, nation-dividing, world-dividing situations, not one has the power to tear us apart if ... we “go high” and stay focused on the true source of our unity, the love of God known in Jesus Christ.

That truth of indivisible unity is a big truth. And yet imagine the enormous obstacles to it: Wars and rumors of wars, tribal strife, the desperation of world-wide refugee movements and the pressure on those countries receiving them, vast inequalities of wealth between classes, racial tensions rooted in

deep history and current struggle, political worldviews in open battle, animosity and distrust between religious groups, international jockeying for power, families suffering behind the thin veneer of respectability.

Nothing can separate us? Lord have mercy. It surely looks like it does to me. Every single day. The Darwinian survival of the fittest plays itself out on the world stage. Behold the lizard.

You see, if all we turn to is ourselves, well, we’re the problem. Which is why Rev. Owens is absolutely right. We have to go high – high above our instinctual animal nature – to the place where nothing can separate us.

Our lower natures, our lizard brains, our dog-eat-dog inclinations, our tribal rivalries, continue divide and separate us. Only going high, to the place of God’s beauty, love, grace, mercy, kindness, justice, reconciliation, restoration, compassion and forgiveness makes it possible that nothing can separate us. Only going there.

If Rev. Owens gives us Part 1 to *nothing can separate us*, I want to tag team with Part 2.

Have you ever thought about that word, *nothing*? Break that word down: *no-thing*. No *thing* can separate us from the love of God.

In a world of things – objects, people, events, powers and principalities – no-thing has the power to separate us from one another. And why?

Take this one step further. In the Biblical tradition, what happens when you try to bring the absolute, infinite, eternal power and energy of the universe, the mystery of God down to the level of the finite, the level of a thing, a person, an object? What do you make when you do that? You make an idol. You've shrunken the infinite God down into a finite thing. And then when you worship the shrunken God as an idol you become what? An idol worshipper, an idolater. God shrinks and then you shrink to match. Idolaters became as small as the idols they worship.

If you worship a Golden calf then you and your world shrinks to that size. And we have lots of golden calves.

We shrink God into pint-sized things, objects, people, ideas, ideologies, institutions and temporary centers of worldly power. And then we worship them. Doing that can separate us from God, our neighbors and ourselves. We just shrivel up. As G.K. Chesterton said, "When we cease to worship God we don't worship nothing, but worship every *thing*."

Shrinking God into a thing and worshipping the thing creates inevitable wrong relationships and conflicts. We can have heroes, role models, mentors, examples, inspirations ... but we don't make them into God, lift them to the level of the eternal.

When we shrink God so small that God becomes equivalent with us, then we have *self-idolatry*. Worship of the self. The collapse of the self into pride and narcissism. Lifting us up to more than we really are.

We've turned the earthen vessels formula upside down and backwards. Jesus said, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels – so that we do not confuse the glory of God with our own." Idol worship and self-idolatry creates a wrong relationship so that we end up worshipping the earthen vessel, the container. We expect loyalty to the earthen vessel rather than the treasure inside. And that wrong relationship sets the stage for inevitable disappointment, division, injustice and distortion.

God is no-thing. We do not worship a shrunken God in the world of things. And we do not worship ourselves or our neighbor as the shrunken God.

The answer is keeping God in the right place and worshipping God rightly.

No-thing shall separate us from God and one another because we do not turn God into a thing. We don't have a God that is a thing, a person, even a super person or thing.

We have a God that is the creative and sustaining power, the energy system, the cosmic intelligence of the universe. We have an infinite and eternal God that gets *revealed* to us finite creates who live in time and space:

This infinite God revealed through the book of nature, revealed through the in-breaking of events, revealed through the groaning that is too deep for words, revealed through Jesus Christ.

Our God is no-thing. We do not worship a God that we have reduced to a thing. We worship no thing/person we have exalted into a god.

No, we worship the Lord of heaven and earth, whose breath and fingerprints are all over this planet, a God in whose image we are created, and a God from whom nothing shall separate us.

Brothers and sisters, hear the good news:

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine,
or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors
through him who loved us.

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 any
thing in all creation will be able to separate us from
the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.”