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I was not originally one of the speakers planned for today; however, our friend Keith was not able to be here. This is, though, the passage he'd chosen to reflect and speak on. When he chose this passage, I had a moment of personal reflection. This was the very first scripture passage I was invited to speak on here at this podium, I believe 9 or 10 years ago. I did not feel confident or feel qualified to be up here speaking, but I spent time with this very same passage and I spoke that day, with Lois Spreen as my companion reflector. Talk about intimidating!

I spent several weeks considering Romans back then, how it pertained to me, and in the end, my reflection that day was very personal. I shared of many ways I'd believed the opposite of this passage—that I had been and done things that left me torn from the love of Christ, outside that great love, separate. I spoke of the ways that I was learning to live into another truth that had begun to be spoken into me here in this sanctuary.

I couldn't find that old reflection, and even if I could, it wouldn't matter. The truth is what I would write now in reflection on this scripture might hold the same nugget of truth—that indeed I am convinced more than ever now that not death, life, angels, rulers, things present or to come, power, height, depth, any affliction, distress, persecution, famine or anything else in all creation can separate me, nor any one of you, from the love of Christ. That is the truth I have lived into. It is the truth I speak into our children of SPC.

But what I know now is that scripture is meant to be alive in and among us. I've walked with my faith many years since that first reflection and so this Romans passage has gained a new life in me.

Today I might reflect instead on the weakness that I feel sometimes by the hour—as a mom, a Christian Educator, a citizen, as a human called to love. Often this weakness sits heavy on me. It's this heavy weakness that moves in me as sighs too deep for words. How to answer the call of our days, of these times, as a Christian, when that identity is so fraught? How to answer the call of these days and not separate myself or anyone else for that matter, particularly these beautiful children, from the love of Christ?

I lean back into Romans—into the image of Jesus, the one who is of human flesh with sorrow and joy and an often-heavy walk in this world—that we are conformed to, in whom we are made part of a larger family. And in that I remember—none of this is up to me alone. We’ve been given an identity to trust in, not to control. I am held in this identity; held in a love I can trust in and cling to. Held in this larger family—our SPC family and the family of God. Each of us is.

One of the most often recited passages from this Romans text, and perhaps (according to my deep theological reflections) also one of the most misunderstood, is 8:28, that God works all things together for good **FOR** those who love Him. But I’ve come to like what NT Wright has to say: that the original Greek is telling us that “God works all things for good **WITH** those who love him.” There it is—our role and all:

The most any of us can do is claim this identity and faith for ourselves, get to know deeply what it means to hold our identity in this family of Christ’s love, reflect upon it, live into, and reveal it in our walk in this world as we work with the love of God under our feet and in our words and actions.

Thanks be to God for our fellow congregants who took up the charge and call throughout this month of July to become part of the scaffolding of how we as a church understand our identity and live into that. Each of them reminded me that when any one of us is laden with sighs too deep for words, and the Holy Spirit’s intercession feels absent, we can stand here and remind one another that nothing in life, nor in death, nor in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. May it be so.