**Nothing Can Stop Us!**

**Text: Romans 8:31**

**Preached by Bruce D. Ervin**

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If you are of a certain age, you may’ve spent many hours of your young adult years watching Star Trek: The Next Generation. There was some pretty deep stuff in those shows. If you don’t know the series, here’s a quick review of some key terms: the spaceship at the show’s center is the Enterprise, it’s commanded by Captain Jean Luc Picard, and when the Enterprise is under attack it can surround itself with a force field the shields it from enemy fire.

Armed with that knowledge, let me tell you about one episode. The Enterprise was typically going where no one had gone before, and it seemed to be under attack. So Captain Picard ordered, “Shields up!” But the attack intensified, and the Captain ordered, “More shields.” As more of the ship’s power was being diverted to the force field that shielded the Enterprise, the situation was becoming critical. But the attack continued to intensify, so still more power was diverted to the shields. You could hear the beginning of panic in the Captain’s voice. “*More* shields!”, he commanded again. There was no more power to feed to the shields, and the attack was about to tear the Enterprise apart, when suddenly the Captain ordered, “Shields down!” And the attack ceased.

The Enterprise had come into contact with something like a cosmic magnifying mirror. The apparent attack was nothing more than the power of the ship’s shields being magnified and reflected back on the ship. As the “attack” increased, and the crew’s fear increased, the crew sent more power to the shields, which only made the situation worse. More fear, more shields, more destructive force being magnified back on the ship. In other words, the problem was the crew’s own fear. But when they took a risk and lowered the shields, the crisis past.

That Star Trek episode tapped into one of the key realities of human nature: Fear is our primary foe. When President Roosevelt famously said, “We have nothing to fear by fear itself,” he was not just voicing a politically astute line, he was also saying something profound about human nature. When we’re in a tough situation, the biggest problem is often not the situation itself but our *fearful response* to the situation. In our fear, we deepen the crisis. When we panic, we lose touch with the resources that can save us.

Which is why we often need to return to Romans 8. Here we find some of the most comforting, some of the most fear-reducing words in the Bible. At least, that’s what I’ve found over the years. Take a listen, once again, to some of the words that Suzanne read a moment ago:

“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory about to be revealed to us.”

“In all things God works for good…”

Those whom God predestined, God called, justified and glorified.

“What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?!”

“For I am sure that nothing in all Creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.”

You see, God is the Resource that saves us. And God has it all figured out. All we have to do is follow God’s lead. God has the future of this church figured out, God has the future of this nation figured out, God has the future of the world figured out. We can’t see it yet, but that’s okay. God can see it, and that’s all that we need to know for now.

Abraham Lincoln was not only our greatest president, he probably also had the deepest faith of all of our presidents as well. In fact, there’s probably a connection between his deep faith and his greatness. The key thing that kept President Lincoln going through the *darkest* days of the Civil War was is *unshakable* faith in the Providence of God; his *certain* knowledge that the Hand of God is guiding history toward an outcome that is good and fair and just. That knowledge calmed his fear. It helped him to keep a steady hand on the tiller.

In all things, God works for good. If God is for us, who can be against us? What do we have to fear?

You see, when we fear, we horde, we circle the wagons, we get into this fortress mentality which freezes us in place and prevents us from going in the bold, new directions in which God is calling us to go.

Like a hiker whom I met on the Appalachian Trail named Dave. Dave had run out of water. He’d camped the night before at a place where the spring had run dry, and at noon the next day he was still holed-up at this spot where there was no water. He was too afraid to move. There was probably water at the next campground a few miles down the trail, but Dave decided to stay where he was.

Dave was frozen in place. In his fear, he refused to move. His immediate problem wasn’t his lack of water, but his fear. Yes, there was a risk that after walking a few miles he’d find that there was no water at the next campground either, but since he knew there was no water where he was, it was a risk worth taking.

In our fear, we fail to take the risks that we need to take to move ahead. In our fear and hording, we fail to allocate the resources that we need to move out. In our fear we get stuck in a place where we’ve been for a long time, imagining that this time, even when we do the same things that we’ve been doing for years, somehow things will be different and there will be a better outcome.

In our fear, we are frozen in place. Just like Dave. But here’s the good news: we don’t have to be afraid. God has it figured out. God is walking with us as we journey into the future. God is showing us the new paths that we are called to travel and the risks that are worth taking as we seek to advance the Kingdom of God in this place. God’s Providence is already moving us forward.

If God is for us, then who can be against us? If God is for us, then no risk that we might take will ultimately defeat us.

Brothers and sisters, I want you to take a risk this morning. I want you to make a financial pledge to the new mission of this congregation. If you made a pledge last year, than I encourage you to make a bigger pledge this year. If you’ve never made a pledge before, then I encourage you to take the risk of making one for the first time. And it *is* a risk, because once you’ve said that you’re going to give a certain amount of your income for God’s work, right off the top, you’re taking a risk that there might not be enough money left for the other necessities of life. But it’s a risk worth taking because you’ll never experience the marvelous ways in which God provides until you lower your shields and give God the space to do some marvelous things in your life; things that you never dreamed were possible.

You see, with God, all things are possible. And like we said, God has it figured out anyway. But God needs you, and your generosity, to move the plan forward.

We’ve got $5000 in the budget to provide seed money for implementing Stage 1 of our Future Story. The Future Story is our 5 year plan that you’re going to help write in the coming months; our new mission which God has prepared for us and to which God is calling us. That’s $5000 that we didn’t budget last year. And we need your pledge to help us raise it.

We’ve got $15,000 in the budget to finance our new musical outreach program into the schools of Bedford; reaching out to students with God-given musical gifts who maybe don’t have the opportunity to develop those gifts, or maybe they don’t have a church home in which to offer the fruit of those gifts back to God. We can provide that home for them…*and*, for their parents. So there’s an evangelistic component to this outreach program, which will cost us $7,000 more than we budgeted for our music program last year. And we need your pledge to help us raise it.

And, of course, there are all of the other expenses that are necessary to carry out the mission of this caring community known as First Christian Church. And we need your pledge to help us engage in that mission.

I love this congregation. And the testimonies that we’ve heard these past few weeks have helped me to love you all even more, if that’s possible. So now it’s time to make our pledges. If you’ve already made your pledge, that’s fine. If you haven’t, I hope that you brought your pledge card with you to be filled out today. If you need a pledge card, we have one for you. Just raise your hand and a Deacon will bring one to you. So, you need a pledge card? Hands up. Let’s take a few moments to think about all of the ways in which God has blessed us, and pray about the mission to which God is calling us, and the financial pledge that God is calling you to make as we step out on that new mission. When you’re ready, please fill out that card and the Deacons will collect them in a few minutes. Again, hands up if you need a pledge card. Thanks, Mary Ruth, for your gift of music while we do this.