* Nuthin can separate
* Romans 8: 18
* Romans 8: 31
* Romans 8: 35
* Romans 8: 38-39
* I thank Pastor Amy for opportunity to be here today
* Though I don’t preach here very often, I do preach around 20 times per year at other churchs
* And I help at The Gathering in Middletown
* Any fans of college football?
* Couple weeks ago when University of Cincinnati’s football team traveled to Columbus to play the Buckeyes, the Cincinnati Zoo and Columbus Zoo saw a fund raiser opportunity
  + They decided to stage a football game
  + Rather than having 1 Zoo play against the other, they decided to form a team of big animals, with critters from both zoos to play against a team of little animals
  + So it was big animals against the little animals
  + Didja hear about the game?
  + First quarter was all big animals, half time score of 35-0
  + And as luck would have it, big animals got the ball to start the second half
  + First down, they ran their bread n butter play that worked so well in the first half – elephant up the middle
  + BOOM, big hit, big tackle, elephant stopped for NO GAIN
  + Second and 10. Big animals a little surprised, then tried power sweep, with rhinoceros carrying the ball
  + BOOM, big hit, big tackle, this time for 2 yard loss.
  + WOW
  + 3rd and 12
  + Big animals were a little stunned, then never got to third down in first half
  + So they tried screen pass to Fiona, the famous hippo
  + Fiona was born prematurely and was hand-held and fed as a baby and through that incredible love and care, survived, when the doctors were doubtful
  + Thousands of pictures were taken of her, millions of dollars raised as Fiona became the face of the zoo
  + By now, Fiona is over 900 pounds and can run quickly over short distances
  + So the screen pass went to Fiona
  + BOOM, big hit, big tackle, this time for 3 yard loss
  + 4th and 15, big animal coach is mad, calls time out and begins to yell at his players
  + Different emotion on other sideline as little animals gathered around their coach
  + Coach said, “who tackled the elephant on first down?”
  + “I did, coach”, said the centipede
  + “nice play, centipede”
  + “then who tackled the rhino on the second down sweep play?”
  + Again, centipede said “I did coach”
  + Outstanding, now who tackled the hippo on the screen pass
  + Again, I did coach, said the centipede
  + This led coach to say ”I’m really pleased you made three great tackles for us this half. But what happened, where were you during first half?”
  + Uh coach, I was getting my ankles taped
* With the Psalmist, we pray “may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord, our Rock and our redeemer.
* Today’s message is gonna be a little different for me,
  + Typically, I try to make sense out of Lectionary suggested scripture
  + But today is more of a personal testimony
  + Goes back to birthday, last March
    - I share birthday with Belinda Mallett, Jack Eley
  + I had been coughing a lot, felt kinda bad
  + Had difficulty doing anything
  + I taught my weekly class at Hope House on my Monday birthday, but struggled to get through it
  + Got worse and worse as week wore on
  + To point, I couldn’t walk across a room
  + Carol finally TOLD me we were heading to hospital
  + And with that declaration, she saved my life
  + Took me to brand new Kettering Hospital Emergency center, near us, at I-75 and 122 in Middletown
* They took chest x-ray, echocardiorgram
  + Then came these words from the attending physician – you have congestive heart failure
    - You talkin’ to me?
    - YEP, he was talkin’ to me
* ordered ambulance for ride to Kettering Medical Center
* yeah, ambulance ride. No taxi, no driving in your car, AMBULANCE ride
* Got to KMC, admitted
* Learned that the valve in my aorta was bad
* Most of you have aortic valve that has 3 flaps that seal the valve as heart pumps
* Through some genetic birth defect, I only had 2 flaps on the aorta
* And it wasn’t working.
* Needed to be replaced
* Open heart surgery
* Turns out there was a family gathering that weekend, found out, my first cousin was scheduled for same surgery, week after me.
  + His father had same surgery few years ago
  + Others in family have abnormal aorta valves
  + So there is a family trait of aorta trouble
  + Really wish this family secret had been shared
  + While I was in hospital I heard that Mick Jagger had the same condition
    - Didn’t know he was in our family
* And I am getting to why I am boring you with the details
* I was in the hospital for 11 days
* For it was the first Saturday night and Sunday morning on which I was in hospital that the real story came to light
* In my first discussion with the surgeon, he told me that some percentage of patients who receive a replacement aorta valve wind up needing a pace maker
  + And some percentage of patients die during the surgery
* Some percentage die
  + I certainly heard that
* During my long hospital stay and I had a host of friends from here and family come visit me, but nearly every visit was during the daylight or early evening
  + I was alone most nights
* And it was on that first Saturday night, while alone, I wasn’t terribly cheerful, feeling sorry for myself
* Pastor Amy had been by for a visit and she was there later than most visitors in that she came after Saturday night worship service ended here
* After she went home, the night turned to loneliness for me
* And the words of the surgeon rang in my head
  + Some percentage of patients die
  + Some percentage of patients die
  + The night wore on, I sunk into a deeper funk
  + Certainly no Joy, no sleep either
  + So on this sleepless night, I planned my funeral
  + Scriptures, music, who would speak….
* And I recorded all of those details
* Then that lonely Saturday night slowly dragged into Sunday morning
* And it dawned on me that I wasn’t going to church
* I was scheduled to preach that Sunday, at Franklin, had a sermon ready and everything
* But when we decided to go to hospital, had to ask a friend and CLM colleague, Jenn Fry, to be there instead
  + And I owe her for stepping in
* But there I was, dressed elegantly in a hospital gown, with a written sermon, but no place to preach
* What to do during normal worship time.
* That Sunday, I was sure that I could find a recorded service or maybe even a live service on a hospital TV channel
* Maybe that was the best I could do for worship
* I was fiddling with my tablet, in Facebook, when I found a podcast from New Hope United Methodist Church, in Dayton
* My buddy Dan Renfro, who was chaplain at Otterbein Springboro, where I volunteered, had a podcast that contained a devotion, a small worship service
* And I found it live, not recorded
* I was able to type stuff in my tablet and Dan could see what I typed, in real time
* Now this had my attention
* I shared that I was in the hospital, facing open heart surgery
* Dan who is a good friend, was all over me in prayer
* And regulars of his podcast and church, were also all over me in prayer, just because I was a friend of their pastor
* That was remarkable to me
* Then it got even better
* For Dan opened his Bible to Romans 8 during his devotion
  + And he led me to read all of Romans 8
* There is so much rich scripture in Romans 8
* Verse Romans 8: 18, for Paul wrote
  + I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.
  + Hey homeboy, do you understand this?
  + The pain and fear from my situation is nothing like the glory that awaits
  + Now there is a message of hope
* Then I read on….
* Romans 8: 31
  + What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?
  + Nothing is against me, for I know God is for me
  + And not just me, God is for us
  + So why fear the surgery
* Romans 8: 35
  + Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?
  + Nope, none of that stuff will separate us
* And today’s scripture
* Romans 8: 38-39
  + For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
* I was a Certified Lay Minister before all this happened
* So my faith was well-formed and solid
* But after this experience, I became a Romans 8 proclaimer
* For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present not the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord
* That is such an assurance
* Now, there will be bad times
* There will be suffering
* There will be temptation
* But nuthin, **nuthin**, will separate me or us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus
* Hallelujah!!
* Now, I tend to see humor in situations
* I try to be humorous
* Sometimes my jokes are humorous
* Sometimes, my jokes are trying
* But I try to be humorous
* I certainly try to use humor when I speak
* This really happened, which makes this funny to me, or maybe disrespectful or maybe weird
  + As I said, Surgeon told me that some percentage of open heart patients die during the surgery
  + In language of computer guy turned Certified Lay Minister, this is rough sequence of events that occurred during my surgery
    - I was wheeled into Operating Room, saw about 10 folks in there – struck me that it would take 10 people to participate in my surgery
    - I was knocked out by Anesthesiologist
    - Chest opened by saw, ribs separated at sternum
    - Heart lung machine attached and activated to help preserve my 4 remaining brain cells
      * And woohoo, 3 of ‘em made it
    - Then my heart was chemically stopped
    - YIKES, what?
    - Yeah, they had to stop my heart from beating so they could operate on in
    - So heart was stopped by chemicals
    - Surgeon did his amazing work
    - Then a rather important step for me
      * Time to restart heart
      * Thank God, thank amazing medical team, it did restart
    - Heart lung machine detatched, removed
    - Close ribs, close skin
    - Move me to ICU
    - Where I remained unconscious for another 9 or 10 hours
    - This all began around noon on Wednesday
    - At 2:30 am following Thursday morning, I stirred, while now in ICU
    - Eyes opened, 3 surviving brain cells came as close to working as they normally do
    - I noticed:
      * Room had lots of medical equipment
      * 2 medical personnel were in room talking, either about me, or next vacation
      * Large tube was in my mouth, down throat, I guess to my lungs or in that direction
      * I had a breathing tube in place
      * I could not draw a breath, the tube and machine did all the breathing for me
      * I could not utter a sound since no air passed over larynx
      * Continuing my medical inventory
        + I saw tubes and wires every where into me , out of me
        + 2 large tubes coming out of my chest – carrying away surgery gunk from my chest – I will enjoy those scars for the rest of my days
        + My face itched, I tried to scratch it and discovered my hands were restrained
    - So, restrained hands, breathing tube, wires and tubes everywhere –
      * Lookin’ kinda bleak
      * Hmmmm either I survived the surgery and am in recovery or if I died, heaven is really really disappointing
    - And with that thought, it occurred to me that I am whacko
    - Guess I should have realized that before
* Few hours later, the breathing tube was removed
* And over the next 5 days, all of the wires and tubes were removed
* And I was sent home the following Monday
* Then my wonderful brother and sister began encouraging me to be active
  + They each drove a half hour to drag me along for a short walk
  + Then every couple of days, the walk became a little longer and longer
  + We got up to about a mile with a couple small hills to climb
* Then I began cardiac rehab sessions at Atrium Hospital
  + 3 days a week at 7:00 am, connect heart monitors and pound the treadmill, cross trainer, eventually lift light weights
  + And I was getting stronger
  + I now hit it for about 45 to 55 minutes in the gym
  + Surgery was a miracle
  + Second miracle is that 6 months later, I still hit the gym 3 days a week, at 7:00 am
  + So I have been and will be regularly exercising my body
* And best of all, every day in the rehab gym, as my physical exercise ends, I find my buddy Dan’s podcast and work on my spiritual exercise
* By 8:30 am, I have exercised my so-called muscles, and heart, and at 9:00 I tune into Dan’s Devotional podcast
  + So exercise the body, strengthen the soul, daily
* So I encourage every Facebook user to find New Hope Recovery Church, from Xenia Ave in Dayton, and join us in the daily podcasts
* Dan graciously calls me Pastor Dave – so if you listen to Dan and hear Pastor Dave, he’s talking about me
  + He doesn’t use Romans 8 every day, as he did that day in March
  + But we can read it any time
  + For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
  + By the love of Christ for me, I am connected to God
* By the love of Christ for YOU, you are connected to God
* Rejoice in that fact
* Celebrate that fact
* Share that wonderful news
* Nothing will separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus
* We are connected, in Love to Almighty God through our savior Jesus Christ
* Connected, not separated