

Written Copy: Romans 11:22-27 “Where Everyone’s Glad You Came”

12th Sunday @ Pentecost: Proper 15

Sunday, August 20th, 2023

Text: Roman 11:22-27

²² Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. ²³ And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. ²⁴ For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree. ²⁵ Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”; ²⁷ “and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”

The text’s intent

Neither Jew nor Gentile has a preferred place in Church. Both are welcomed by the faith Abraham had in God’s promised salvation plan. This faith marks the true Israel that is God’s chosen people, not who you are, who your parents are, or what you have done. All people are consigned to condemnation because all have sinned. Yet God shows mercy on all people through the Gospel Message detailing the work of the Redeemer and His atoning sacrifice which He gave for all. No one chooses to be a member of His Church; God chooses them and makes them members through His call to faith. The Jews were not excluded by God but excluded themselves through unbelief, and thereby were severed from being His people, just as unbelieving Gentiles will be. His Israel. And it was He who through the Gospel Message grafted in the disobedient unbelieving Gentiles through the Gospel. Just as He did with them, He can restore the Jews who turn back to Him in repentant faith in Christ. Both Jew and Gentile are made His children not by who they are, but by His mercy and love that He has for all people. He creates people to love. No one has room to boast over another.

Focus Statement:

In the Church none of us has any special standing. None of us are worthy except by the love, kindness and mercy of the Heavenly Father as shown by Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who suffered, died, and rose again to call us into this fellowship with Him and one another. He doesn’t exclude anyone. Those who are excluded chose to be so by refusing the free gift of faith in Christ. There is no one who is too bad to be called into this fellowship, and no one who is so good they deserve to be here on their own merit. We are all equally loved in His eyes. He desires all might be saved and come to this knowledge of Him and our fellowship.

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

We can fall into the trap of making the Church more like an exclusive clique than what the Lord designs it to be. This is especially true when we are a homogenous group. Even then we can fall into restricting or pushing away others who look, act, dress differently than us, including those the Lord placed us here to call out to.

What the hearer should do as a result:

See others through Jesus’ eyes. See ourselves as unworthy of being members as those we might want to exclude. Realize that we don’t choose who is in fellowship with us, but Christ calls them by faith, and accept who He calls, welcoming them with open arms.

Subject Sentence: All Belong in His House by the Mercy of Christ

Introduction:

As a parent, have you had the experience of raising daughters? If so, you probably heard them at some point come home from school saying, “*So and So* hates me.” Or “the girls in my class are so mean to me.” Raising two girls I found that some of it comes from having a child who is on the sensitive side. But I’ve also seen how girls in school, even in a Lutheran School, can be standoffish, snooty and stuck up, and just downright mean to those who are different in some way. My kids went to a Lutheran School that had a lot of other kids from well-to-do families. We were not that. My kids attended by the grace of God, financial aid, and by us making sacrifices. I couldn’t afford to dress them in the same outfits many of their classmates wore. I didn’t have the big house and swimming pools that many of their classmates had. And I knew that bothered them. It bothered me. Combine that with a sensitive child and it was fuel for some of the other girls, even those that belonged to the youth group at our Church, to play mean games; things like invite my daughter to a birthday party, and the other girls there would purposefully ignore and avoid her. It made me upset and angry as a parent. Imagine how it made God feel.

Well as the girls grew up a lot of that went away. They found more accepting friends and grew in self-confidence about who they were. The problem is those games people play as kids can carry over into adulthood. Our society is a very fractured place. People are ready to take sides on many things and exclude others because they are not “like us”. And it not only goes on in society, but it can cross over into the Church too. It’s the problem Paul is dealing with in this section of his letter to the Church in Rome.

Division and Exclusivity in Church In Rome

The Church in Rome is made up of some Jewish believers in Jesus, but more predominately Gentile believers. And it appears that each group views the other with feelings of contempt, superiority, standoffishness, and snootiness.

There are the Jewish believers who take pride in who they are, and Paul says they have reason to, up to a point. They are descended from the ones God called out of Egypt and called to be His chosen people. To them He gave the Scriptures: His words of instruction on who He is, and who He was calling them to be, along with the promise that the Messiah-the Savior of the world would come from them. But He also tells them in **Deuteronomy 7:6-8** ⁶ **“For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷ It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸ but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.**

The LORD chose them because He loved them, not because they were inherently better than anyone else. In fact, in Egypt, while in slavery, some of them had turned away from Him to worship the false god's of Egypt. But He had made a promise to their forefathers, all the way back to Abraham, that his descendants would be God's chosen special people. He promised Abraham that although he was elderly and without children, that the LORD would make His descendants more numerous than the stars in the sky or the sands on the seashore. And that from them would come one who would be a blessing to the whole world. This was God's Messianic promise that would be fulfilled through Abraham by Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew descended from Abraham in His humanity. And Abraham, although he had no sign or proof that this could ever happen, and in fact according to human logic seemed impossible, still believed. And his faith is what declared him to be right with God.

While the Jews could rejoice in the grace and mercy the LORD had shown them throughout their history, including the fact that the Messiah came from them, they were not to become haughty and proud and think that the LORD loved them more than anyone else or in exclusion of everyone else. The LORD chose them, set them aside as His special people, giving them His word and promise, and brought into the world the Messiah from them, not so that they would be the only ones saved, but so that they would be His witnesses to the world of the Gospel message of Jesus Christ, Savior of all people.

Jesus gives an important witness to this in our Gospel Lesson in **Matthew 15:24** when the Canaanite woman comes to Him seeking to have a demon cast out of her daughter **He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."** By birth, according to her humanity, she is definitely not of the house of Israel, but a Gentile, and therefore seems to be unworthy of His attention, or His miraculous help. Yet what is the end result of this encounter? **Matthew 15:28 Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire."** **And her daughter was healed instantly.** Did Jesus change His mind? Did this woman's constant crying and nagging wear Him down? Most assuredly not. Jesus brought His disciples into this Gentile area so that they would meet this woman. It might seem like He made an exception with her. But Jesus, and therefore God's idea of what constitutes the house of Israel, what makes a person part of His chosen people, His Church, is not what race you are or who your parents were. It's about the same saving faith that Abraham had in God's promises. This Canaanite woman believed Jesus to be the Messiah sent for all people, even for her. In repentant faith she confessed she didn't deserve anything, but that just the crumbs of Jesus mercy and grace were enough. Her faith, given to her by the Holy Spirit, made her one of the lost sheep of Israel. Jesus did what He did and said what He said so that she would witness that faith to His disciples, and through the Gospel account to us as well. That faith is what declares those believing Jews to be members of His Church, His gathering of His children here on earth, not what their bloodline descendance from Abraham.

Paul also addresses the Gentiles who, in a different way, thought they were better than the Jews. After all it was the influx of Gentiles who readily believed the Gospel that Paul preached. In the synagogues across the Roman Empire where Paul travelled, he always proclaimed the Gospel first to the Jews, following the Lord's purpose that the Jews would then be His witnesses to the Gentiles around them. But for the most part the Jews turned on Paul, persecuting him, having him arrested, stirring up the townsfolk against him, while instead the Gentiles believed and eagerly joined in the ministry of proclaiming the Gospel to their neighbors and throughout the Roman Empire.

Paul points out to them that it was because of the Jewish resistance that he came and preached to them personally in the first place. He also reminds them that the Church the LORD has called them into isn't some new organization built and centered around them. By the power and working of the Holy Spirit, they were given the same faith that Abraham had been given. They had been grafted into God's chosen people Israel, composed not of those Jewish by birth, but those who share the same saving faith in God's Messianic promise as the Patriarchs, the promise revealed and realized in Jesus Christ: born from the Jews, to save the Jews, and the Gentiles, and all people who believe in Him.

Paul speaks to both Jew and Gentile when He states **Romans 11:30-32** ³⁰ **For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience,** ³¹ **so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy.** ³² **For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.** Both Jew and Gentile, including you and me, have been disobedient to Him in thought, word, and deed. But He had mercy on the Jews when He sent Christ to teach, preach, and heal among them. And He called 12 Jewish men to follow Him in faith as His apostles. And they on Pentecost were used by the Spirit to bring 3,000 plus Jewish people into His fellowship of believers, the Church. And by their witness the Spirit called many more Jew and Gentile to join with this special fellowship of believers that all share in the same faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. Both Jew and Gentile were called by faith into the Lord' Jesus Christ's Church and are equally loved and cared for by Him.

Jesus' Purpose For the Church Today

Well, what about us here today? We don't have to deal with the issue of Jews vs. Gentiles that Paul did in his day. So, what does the Holy Spirit have to teach to us today from this Lesson? Can we in our own way suffer from exclusivity, standoffishness, and snootiness in our relationship with one another? Can we at times suffer from the human tendency to surround ourselves in a clique where we discourage those who are different from us from joining with us? Can we, in a manner similar to the Church in Rome, lack patience and understanding with those around us who dress differently and act differently from us; those who haven't been members of this Church as long as we have?

The Spirit would remind us too of what the basis for our fellowship is: that faith we share in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. By our thoughts, words, and actions all of us are unworthy to be members of His Church, His family of faith. But by the grace and mercy shown to us in Jesus Christ we are declared to be what we cannot be on our own. We all have the same Redeemer who came to save us from separation from our Creator God. He died to remove all the ways we show ourselves to be unworthy. He paid the price to call us, to call you into fellowship with Him and one another. And that faith we share in Him, the same faith that was given to Abraham, is what declares you to be right with God, completely forgiven, and worthy to be called His beloved child. It is the unifying force of the Church and overrules all the differences that our sinful hearts, the world, and the devil would seek to use to destroy the fellowship Christ desires us to have with one another. That faith brings to us His perfect love that we share with one another. And that love helps us see one another as He sees us, precious forgiven children, much loved by Him.

And it's not all about us who are gathered here this morning. If it was, we would be more like a social club than the Church. The special fellowship of love and faith we have here is something sorely lacking in the world around us. There are many people feeling like outcasts, lonely and unwanted. As one of my professors once commented, "They drive to work in their little boxes separated from those around them, fearful to look, to make eye contact, or even wave, lest it be taken wrong and cause a road rage incident. They no longer sit on the porch and have conversations with their neighbors as our parents and grandparents did. They might not even know who those neighbors are. They focus their attention on their TV's, computers, and phones in place of the fellowship and interaction God designed us to want and need. Their connection is through electronic devices, instead of human interaction in person. And that connection, while better than nothing, is not how God designed us to live as social creatures.

It's the premise for the theme song of the TV show Cheers: "***Making your way in the world today takes everything you've got. Taking a break from all your worries sure would help a lot. Wouldn't you like to get away?" "Roll out of bed, Mr. Coffee's dead The morning's looking bright. And your shrink ran off to Europe and didn't even write. And your husband wants to be a girl. Be glad there's one place in the world ... Where everybody knows your name. And they're always glad you came. You wanna go where people know that people are all the same. You wanna go where everybody knows your name.***" That place was the fictitious bar named Cheers in the sitcom. But what people are really looking for can't be found in a bar. Instead, what many find is temporary numbness in a bottle that only increases loneliness.

What they truly desire, and need, is the fellowship, friendship, and community we have here in the Church. A fellowship based on the fact that all people are the same: sinners who are loved and made perfect by faith in Jesus Christ. A faith that is given and planted in people not because of who they are, but because of who Christ is, the Savior of the entire world, and your Savior through baptism. It's the place where His Spirit moves us to reach out in friendship to those who are new: something Lamb of God excels in. It's a special fellowship that seeks to do more than just know their name, but who they are, and what their life experiences are. It's a fellowship that rejoices to see them return; always glad they came. It's the place where people who are not related to us by birth become as close or closer than family. It's the fellowship of the family of faith. And it's what the Spirit has to offer through us to those around us who cannot find anything else like it outside of the fellowship of the Church.

Conclusion

Kids by nature can be mean, snooty, stuck up, and standoffish. And as we grow into adults that can continue. We live in a fractured society where people are crying out for the kind of connection, fellowship, and friendship that we can offer here in the Church. A fellowship that recognizes none of us are worthy of the gracious gifts Christ has to offer us. But He makes us worthy by faith. In that fellowship we share the forgiving and understanding love of Christ with one another in a manner that cannot be found in the world. He calls us to share that special fellowship, friendship, and love with one another. But not just one another, with those outside these walls with whom our lives intersect. To invite them to join us for Church functions and for worship. To be willing to come alongside them and welcome them, even if they look and act differently than us. ***"To be the place they want to go where everybody knows your name. And we're always glad they came,"*** Where we share with them the most precious gift we have to share: the love and faith we are given in Jesus Christ that unites us as His precious children, His Church, now and together in eternal life. Amen.