



## Letter to the Romans

### Fall Bible Study 2017

6:00 pm – 7:10

Wednesday Evenings:

October 4, 11, 18, 25, November 1 and 8

*Led by Pastor Peter Nycklemoe*



Central Lutheran  
MINNEAPOLIS

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## Wednesday, October 4

### Welcome – Evening Prayer and Hymn

Welcome to the study of Paul's Letter to the Romans. Over the next six weeks we will study Paul's final letter, a remarkable witness to the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ for you. As with all the Bible study I lead, always come to class. You may be able to finish all the reading, reflect on all the questions or your schedule may not allow for any additional devotional work between sessions. What matters is that you are here, jumping in to the study of scripture – and that is what is most important.

### Quick overview

Paul's Letter to the Romans could be a 20-session class, and even then, only delving into some of the key moments. In six weeks, what we need to do is concentrate on the main passages that define the whole book. As we begin each week, we will pause to reflect on your questions from the devotional reading. Often these questions lead us into the assigned text for the study. After we consider your questions and insights, I will offer some background and insights on the passages to shape the conversation that follows. The flow of this study is indebted to Matthew Marhol, and his Romans: Book of Faith study.

### October

4: Welcome, Getting Started and Session One – Romans 3: 9-31

11: Session Two – Romans 5: 1-11

18: Session Three – Romans 6: 1-23

25: Session Four – Romans 8: 18-39

### November

1: Session Five – Romans 10: 1-21

8: Session Six – Romans 12: 1-21

### The Study of Scripture – Listening for God

Some of you are Bible study veterans; others may be new to this Bible study thing. For all of us, the study of the Bible is one of the most important community callings we have as people of faith. Why? Because God speaks to us through scripture, inviting us to grow in faith, hope and love. The invitation is communal – Bible study is a team activity!

The study of scripture is a matter of the heart. Through the study of scripture, we are responding to the great command, to: "love God with heart, soul and mind and love our neighbor as ourselves." If the study of scripture does not lead us deeper into the loving relationship with Jesus Christ and deeper into the ways we are called to love our neighbor, then why engage in the study of these Holy Scriptures? The pathway for the followers of Jesus Christ is the pathway of daily, deepening love for God and the daily, expanding love for all. After all, remember the song of your youth: "they will know we are Christians by our \_\_\_\_\_." It is interesting, isn't it, that the Book of Acts, and so many other passages of scripture, do not teach that they will know we are Christians by our certainty, by our perfect lives, our successes, power or knowledge. It is amazing that we are known by our love for God and one another.

## Salvation

The love of God for you brings us to salvation, an important word for Paul in Romans. It is a great way to begin, for us to list three things that come to mind when you think of the word saved or salvation:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Scholars might agree that nearly every page of the Bible is grounded in the presence (or absence) of salvation. For Paul, and much of the New Testament, the original language is helpful. Salvation, or save can mean: healing, keep from harm, rescue, or liberate. It can also mean.... freedom, justification, life, reconciliation, redemption, resurrection, Kingdom of God, belonging and identity

Which of these words are the most helpful for you, when you think of your salvation?

## History, Literary, Lutheran and Devotional

The study of scripture is helped by an understanding of the historical context, a literary reading, a Lutheran understanding and a devotional reading of scripture. These four “ways” to read scripture are part of who we are as Christians who do faith with a Lutheran style and substance. In many ways, these readings engage our minds, our hearts, lives, relationship and our souls. What do you remember about Paul, and his letters? What are the challenges in studying Paul’s letters? Do you remember the significance of Romans for Martin Luther? Do you have passages from Romans that have sustained your faith, deepened your love for God or neighbors?

## Romans and today’s lesson from Romans 3: 9-31

Let’s take a moment to open to Romans for a quick overview, and then we will turn to our opening passage for the week.

Now, listen to this early moment in Paul’s letter from chapter 3. You can close your eyes and listen or follow along as it is read. What words or phrases stand out for you? What was confusing or a concern? What set you free or gave you hope?

## Law and Gospel – a key for the study of scripture

As you reflect on this passage, a Lutheran reading is guided by law and gospel, which can be defined in many ways, a few examples are:

- Law binds, Gospel sets free
- Law is hard news, Gospel is good news
- Law is what God asks of us, Gospel is what God does for us
- Law drives us to Jesus Christ, the Gospel is Jesus Christ who saves

Did you hear law and gospel in this passage – literally and devotionally?

## For next week – devotional reading

The daily reading of scripture for devotion and study is an ancient calling for the follower of Jesus. Set aside time each day and read the assigned passage. Sometimes it is helpful to follow the lectio divina reading:

First, just read the text through

Second, read and pause at words or phrases that catch your attention (underline or mark them – why did you pause?)

Third, read the lesson again, how does the word or phrase that caught your eye fit into the whole? Is it law (binds you up) or gospel (sets you free, is good news)?

### Daily Reading

Day One: Romans 1: 1-17

Day Two: Romans 1: 18-32

Day Three: Romans 2: 1-16

Day Four: Romans 2: 17-3:8

Day Five: Romans 3: 9-31

Day Six: Romans 4: 1-25

Day Seven: Romans 5: 1-11

### Further discussion and reflection questions:

1. Paul wrote letters, sometimes to communities or individuals he knew and sometimes to communities or individuals he had never met. In our e-mail and text message culture, what is the difference between a letter and an e-mail/text? Why do we need to revive the lost art of letter writing? How is the letter writing process a strength, what is different?
2. Share a story of a letter you received that had a significant impact on your life. Who sent you the letter, what did it say, how did it impact your life?
3. What can we learn about Paul's letter writing style, a style you will read this week as you read Romans 1? What is the power and importance of beginning with greetings, thanksgivings and affirmations? How might that pattern be a pattern even for our e-mails, text messages and conversations?
4. Take the time to write a letter to someone. Can you follow Paul's pattern: greeting, thanksgivings, affirmations, the body of the letter, closing thoughts and greetings?
5. If you were to write a letter to a faith community today, perhaps the Central faith community, what would you say? What greeting would you share, what thanksgivings to offer, what word of encouragement or joy, what struggles to name and how to close with affirmations and celebrations?

My letter to the Church at Central Lutheran:

Greetings to share:

Thanksgivings to offer:

Words of encouragement or joy:

Struggles to name:

Affirmations and celebrations in closing:

## Wednesday, October 11

### Evening Prayer and Hymn

### Welcome and Christ Care Prayers

Welcome to this week's conversation on Paul's Letter to the Romans. Today we turn to the first five chapters of Paul's letter, with the goal of spending much of our time in chapter 5 and Paul's proclamation of God's radical grace for you and me.

As we begin, if you are just jumping in to the class, always come to class. No matter how balanced or crazy your week, this is a time for holy conversation and learning – whether you had time for the reading or not one minute for yourself. God is here for you, and each class will be a time to grow in faith and love.

### The Study of Scripture – Listening for God

The study of scripture is a matter of the heart. Through the study of scripture, we are responding to the great command, to: "love God with heart, soul and mind and love our neighbor as ourselves." The study of scripture leads us deeper into the loving relationship with Jesus Christ and deeper into the ways we are called to love our neighbor. God is speaking, and we join Samuel each week in saying, "speak, Lord, for your servants are listening."

### Your questions from the reading, insights and opening comments

### Next, Grace

The word for today is grace. Like salvation it is one of the ancient and often hard to grasp words for faith and life.

A key passage of Paul and Paul's community can help us as we begin:

Ephesians 2: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — <sup>9</sup>not the result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

How do we define the word "grace?" How have you experienced the grace of God? What does it mean that we begin worship each week with the greeting, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ....?"

What happens, then, when last week's word and this week's word are joined?

### For by grace you have been saved...

Romans 1: 1-17

Salutation, verses 1-7: Grace to you and peace...

Thanksgiving, verses 8-15

Theme of the Letter, verses 16-17: I am not ashamed of the good news.... Grace

#### Romans 1: 18-32

Guilt of the Gentiles: verses 18-32 (part of the larger whole of the first theme of Paul's letter, running from 1:18 – 3:20.

God's wrath, not God's anger, in response to human... given up....

God has shown, verse 19ff

Complex verses, 24-32, how do they draw us to God and one another in love?

We will return, to this conversation....

#### Romans 2: 1-16

Righteous judgment of God

Paul balances the conversation, love God and love neighbor...

God's kindness is meant to... verse 4

Jew and Gentile, verse 12

#### Romans 2: 17-3:8

The wrestling begins for Paul, verse 17

The sweep of this is challenging, what is the call and duty of those who have privileged status and the actual living of the faith?

Chapter 3 begins with a diatribe style, a hard question that opens the conversation on the very nature of grace.

#### Romans 3: 9-31

Last week's conversation... none is righteous.

How does this passage illuminate, not soften, but rather shape the reading of Romans 1:24ff? It is the constant challenge that verses and sections of scripture cannot be removed from the great arch of the Spirit inspired message – each passage is related and dependent on those that follow.

Verse 24 – justified (saved, healed, forgiven, taken back, set free, renewed) by grace as a gift

#### Romans 4: 1-25

The example of Abraham (rooted in Genesis 12-17)

Verse 16 – depends on faith, promise rests on grace.

Aside: Abraham and Sarah as faith father and mother of all... what might this mean for all the complex religious divisions?

#### Romans 5: 1-11

This is a hinge, a moment when Paul's letter transitions from these first four chapters into what follows in 6-8, then 9-12 and finally 13, 14-16.

Therefore, since... what does that sound like to you?

Results of justification (being saved by grace):

Peace

Access to grace

Suffering leads to endurance

Endurance produces character

Character produces hope  
Hope does not disappoint us... because of love.

Let's pause... open reflection on suffering, history, insights and experiences. Does God cause suffering? Do others cause our suffering? Do we cause our own suffering? Is suffering ever redemptive, positive? Can suffering ever teach, or never? Does it lead to endurance, and eventually to hope, or does suffering just destroy? Did Jesus suffering and death begin the process through which God will end suffering? (What is the one word that describes Jesus' life in the Apostles' Creed?)

Verse 6 – while we were yet weak... reconciled, saved by his life.

### **For next week – devotional reading**

As you reflect on Romans 5:

What binds (Law) and what sets free (Gospel), or  
What is bad news, or good news  
What does God ask of us, what does God do for us  
Where are we driven to Christ, and where does Jesus Christ save?

The daily reading of scripture for devotion and study is an ancient calling for the follower of Jesus. Set aside time each day and read the assigned passage. Sometimes it is helpful to follow the lectio divina reading:

First, just read the text through  
Second, read and pause at words or phrases that catch your attention (underline or mark them – why did you pause?)  
Third, read the lesson again, how does the word or phrase that caught your eye fit into the whole? Is it law (binds you up) or gospel (sets you free, is good news)?

Daily reading schedule:

Day One: Romans 5: 12-14  
Day Two: Romans 5: 15-17  
Day Three: Romans 5: 18-21  
Day Four: Romans 6: 1-11  
Day Five: Romans 6: 12-14  
Day Six: Romans 6: 15-19  
Day Seven: Romans 6: 20-23

### **Further discussion and reflection questions:**

1. Do you know the story of the hymn "Amazing Grace?" Can you sing the first verse, does it open the meaning of grace for conversation? Grace saved, and changed John Newton, from a slave trader to an advocate for the abolition of slavery. How has God's grace changed your life? How has it changed your relationship with God and changed how you live?
2. What faith word do you think defines your life with God, family, friends and neighbors: grace, love, hope, mercy, compassion, faith...? Why? Maybe begin by thinking of a faith word that informs how you live, and ask others to share a word that they might use to describe you. Are they the same, different, why? There are not right or wrong answers here, God's grace alone.

3. We all experience suffering, the brokenness of our lives or the effect of a broken world in our lives. Talk about those moments of suffering, did they bring you closer to God or did you feel that God was absent? The hard part of suffering is that it never makes sense, we can't figure it out. Moments of deep suffering reveal the depth of our human vulnerability. Has suffering caused periods of anger or bitterness in your life? Or, has suffering produced endurance, then character and then the hope that does not disappoint?

4. Maybe the most important question of all, when family or friends are suffering, what are the "do's" and the "don'ts?" How has this wisdom come to you, what cared for you when you were suffering, what did you learn? Who did not care for you, what did they say or do that was not helpful? Now, can you give thanks for and forgive those who helped or hurt?

## Wednesday, October 18

### Evening Prayer and Hymn

### Welcome and Christ Care Prayers

### Salvation... Grace... Identity (Baptism)

God has saved you by grace, freed you from the power of sin by Jesus' death and new life. One image is that you have been pulled out of the lake, pulled up and out by God at the moment when you were drowning. Today you are in the boat of God's love, soaking wet and face to face with Jesus Christ. This is the moment of faith, when your response is to say, "thank you."

Today we arrive at Romans, chapter 6, and the identity given to us in the waters of our baptism: child of God. It is identity that opens up how we live now as the "saved by grace" followers of Jesus Christ. You are baptized into the life, death and new life of Jesus Christ. Saved by grace, so how do we live as the children of God?

### Your questions from the reading, insights and opening comments

#### Baptism

Where were you baptized? Who was there at your baptism? Do you remember your baptismal birthday? These are important questions to consider, part of our identity and story as the children of God. They are as important as where you were born, where you grew up and who comprised your family.

What does baptism mean for daily living? Remember this fourth question of Martin Luther in the Small Catechism? Here is Luther's teaching: "It means that our sinful self, with all its evil deeds and desires, should be drowned through daily repentance; and that day after day a new self should arise to live with God in righteousness and purity forever." Death and new life, each day, is what Luther says happens to us – saved by grace, and given faith as the children of God. You are given a daily identity to live.

#### Identity given in the waters of baptism

Romans 5: 12-14

What is the origin of sin? Paul looks back to Adam and Eve, the origin (or original sin of pride and rebellion). In many ways, Adam and Eve reveal to us what happens when we live from our identity, rather than our identity as the children of God.

Romans 5: 15 and following reflect on the power and wonder of grace

Grace abounds for many... grace exercises domination (verse 21)...

Do we have the power to resist the grace of God?

Romans 6: 1-11

Diatribes again, a big question: What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!

Baptism: new life now; eternal life as a gift.

Verses 5-11 are beautiful, and often forgotten, funeral verses.

Romans 6: 12-14

Therefore... the response to the question deepens.  
You live under grace and not law.

Romans 6: 15-19

If under grace, does how we live matter? It certainly does, because it is about identity.  
It is a matter of the heart... verse 17

Romans 6: 20-23

Our life is in God, rooted in the identity as children of God. Our identity is not as slaves to sin, defined by our worthlessness. We are defined by our worth, as children of God baptized into the death and life of Jesus. Chosen by God, we now live as the chosen, beloved children defined by God's grace.

The free gift of God is identity: child of God.

### **Saved by grace to be children of God**

It is identity, and no law, that has the power to form us, shape us and define how we live. We can tell a child, "you better not get into a car and drink" (law), but studies by Search Institute and others have shown that more kids don't get in and drink because they say, "that is not who I am." (Gospel/identity).

No law can make us into children of God; no fear of punishment can make us conform to lives defined by love, mercy, compassion, or care for one another. It is in knowing we are loved, shown mercy and compassion that opens your life and mine to a life of faith, hope and care. John knew this and wrote in his first letter, a letter that is an extended meditation on baptism that "we love because Christ first loved us." (1 John 4:19) The law is powerless to change us and make us into believers. It is God's love alone that defines you.

### **For next week – devotional reading**

The reflection on lectio divina reading is in last week or the first week's lesson.

Day One: Romans 7: 1-6

Day Two: Romans 7: 7-13

Day Three: Romans 7: 14-25

Day Four: Romans 8: 1-11

Day Five: Romans 8: 12-17

Day Six: Romans 8: 18-30

Day Seven: Romans 8: 31-39

### **Further discussion and reflection questions:**

1. Perhaps one defining perspective for Lutherans is how we reflect on Baptism. It is the moment when we are "saved by grace as a gift," which is never by our own power, ability or choice. It is important to note, in the great family of faith, that this does not mean other traditions are wrong or less right than we.

The freedom in any family with billions of brothers and sisters in Christ is that we all do not respond to our divine parent in the same way. For Lutherans, saved by grace is the understanding that we were drowning, that in fact we had gone under for the last time. Jesus Christ reached down into the water and pulled us out. Alive again, we look at Jesus Christ face to face and exclaim: thank-you. That is the daily moment of faith, a gift in response to being saved. It is not Jesus in the boat calling down into the water, “would you like to choose me, or choose to be pulled out now?” Our choice is taken out of the equation, and that is grace alone. It is what God has done for us. So, two questions to reflect on or discuss:

A. How do we live from the identity in Christ, given in baptism? A gift given to most of us as infants, and a gift we have known our whole life? What are the ways to remember, renew and celebrate “life in the boat” with Jesus each day?

B. How do we live from this identity when other brothers and sisters in Christ might say (perhaps you have a story) that we are, in fact, not saved because we never made a “choice” at a specific moment in time? How do we engage and tell our faith story, in the midst of a variety of wonderful faith stories as the children of God?

2. If our salvation does not depend on our actions, our moral fortitude or perfect faith, how do we live in love, seeking to live a good life, a moral life? How does the perspective that we live from our identity as the children of God, rather than trying to earn an identity as children of God, help open faith, love and morality?

3. Did you hear a “faith word” that shaped your life this past week? What was it, what did it mean to live by grace, love, hope, mercy, compassion, faith...? Did you find that the word opened, for you, what it meant to live as a child of God, to live from your baptismal identity? Any stories to tell, or images to share? If you are reflecting on this alone, perhaps keep a journal for a month with a faith word to shape you – how did it open you to God and to your family, friends and neighbors?

4. Take a moment to read the words of this wonderful baptism song in our ELW hymnal. Discuss what images ring true for you. How is her song an expression of identity and the baptized life?

### **Baptized and Set Free**

1        We are people created,  
chosen by God.

          Then we're washed, ever gently,  
in mercy and love.

          Sin has power no more.  
Jesus opened the door  
          to a fountain bringing healing,  
and wholeness and more.

2        We are fed and we're nourished,  
filled and refreshed.

          Then our hunger returns and  
again we are blessed.

          For whatever the need,  
God is greater indeed:  
          endless ocean, always deeper  
than all of our need.

3        We are nourished by water,  
all living things,  
          and by life that the Spirit  
abundantly brings.

          As we journey toward home,  
may your presence be known:  
          precious river, ever-flowing,  
now carry us home.

4        Now with praise and thanksgiving,  
we join the song.

          All are welcome! We gather  
to sing loud and strong.

          Not enslaved, but set free!  
From now on, all will be  
          one in Jesus, one in water,  
baptized and set free!

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## Wednesday, October 25

### Evening Prayer and Hymn

### Welcome and Christ Care Prayers

### Your questions from the reading, insights and opening comments

### Salvation... Grace... Identity... Suffering (?)

These past weeks we have been centering the study of Romans in a specific word, a theme that opens up the section of Paul's letter. Saved by grace, God gives us the new identity as children of God. Saved by grace as a gift, we live from the identity as children of God. Does this identity as children of God mean that life is free of suffering? Paul's reply: by no means. As the followers of Jesus Christ the struggles and problems related to sin's power remain (sin as separation from God and from one another). In fact, because of our daily identity as the followers of Jesus Christ we are more aware of our dependence on God's grace and the power of sin still at work in our lives and world. As the followers of Jesus Christ, our identity as children of God often leads us into deeper suffering as our hearts open to the broken world. We are moved when we learn that children suffer, injustice prevails, when greed and bitterness harm and arrogance divides us. Yet, we are not alone, and the promise of a God who will not let us go is sufficient for today.

Today we arrive at Romans, chapter 8. It is the passage many of us named as our favorite when we first met. It is a passage rooted in the promise that we are saved by grace as a gift. Jesus Christ will never abandon the children of God.

### Where is God when we suffer?

When we studied chapter 5, we reflected on the process that Paul proposes: that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope and hope does not disappoint. In our conversation, we paused to review all of the unhelpful comments you have heard in the midst of suffering. Can we list a few of those comments again?

Perhaps the most difficult path in the midst of suffering is to remain open to God. We want the answers on our terms and time line. Maybe that is why people are quick to fill in the blank on suffering with comments like:

You must have done something to deserve this...

If you had more faith this would not happen, or it will go away...

God is testing you; this is to strengthen faith....

Or one of the craziest, when we are deep in suffering, is when someone asks us, "Well, why do you think this is happening?" (Is that helpful? No!)

What was helpful, how have you experienced God's grace in the midst of your suffering? For many, it is when family and friends simply listen, are simply with you with the words of love and God's grace. In the face of suffering, quietly being present is the best and the most difficult. No easy answer can bring comfort. Silence can be excruciating and healing at the same time.

## God's love in Christ Jesus

Romans 7: 1-6

Marriage illustration that moves to verse 4 and life after the law

Romans 7: 7-13

Verse 7 – by no means is the law sin, the law reveals, illuminates sin and drives us to Christ.

Verse 13 – the law's goodness does not bring death, sin is death

Romans 7: 14-25

The great inner conflict... I do not do the good, but the very thing I hate

Identity as a child of God is taking hold, and we now see the path, but struggle on the path

It is the classic struggle of our saint and sinner life (Luther), and how often are we caught thinking we are so right and then finding later that we wounded another; or feel the deep struggle within of a vision we cannot live into

Verse 24 – Who will deliver?

Verse 25 – Remember when we are pulled out of the lake and into the boat, we look at Jesus and say the words of faith: thank you!

Romans 8: 1-11

The wrestling changes and a life in the spirit is one of peace

Verse 2 – you are free

Verse 6 – what does it mean to set our minds on the spirit, and not the flesh?

(Earthly bean counting gives way to the greater mind that dwells in grace, compassion, forgiveness and love. Paul is asking, do you really want to live by the tally sheet, or by grace.)

Romans 8: 12-17

Verse 14 – identity, again and again.... Children of God

Verse 17 – complex, suffering with Christ... when do we suffer with him?

Romans 8: 18-30

The creation waits, in some translations, groans... every atom created by God longs for the freedom from the power of sin... Verse 24 – Hope

Verse 26 – Here is the hope, the Spirit intercedes for us, even when we do not have the words – when we face the silence

Verse 28 – Remarkable, all things work together for the good...

Verse 29 and following is a process, parallel to chapter 5 in many ways.

Romans 8: 31-39

What then are we to say?

God is not the adversary, the judge waiting for us to step over the line, an angry parent... God in Jesus Christ is with us in suffering... will not abandon you.

Verse 38 – For I am convinced.... That the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord is the most powerful force in all history, space, time, relationship....

## For next week – devotional reading

Day One: Romans 9: 1-18

Day Two: Romans 9: 9-29

Day Three: Romans 9: 30- 10:4

Day Four: Romans 10: 5-21

Day Five: Romans 11: 1-10

Day Six: Romans 11: 11-24

Day Seven: Romans 11: 25-36

### Further discussion and reflection questions:

1. When you have been in the midst of suffering, what has been helpful? Who offered a listening ear? What does it mean for us as children of God that we cannot take away someone's suffering, but we can be present? How do we speak about the God of love that is with all of us, with us on the good days and with us on the really bad day?
2. Do you have a faith story of when God was present for you? How have you experienced God in the midst of your deepest suffering? Have you experienced the gift of knowing that the "spirit intercedes for us?"
3. Do you have a hard story, a time when you felt the silence of God? Perhaps it is now, in the midst of great anxiety or loss? It is challenging when we face the silence of God, strangely it can drive us away from Church and community? How do we face the great temptation to isolate ourselves when suffering, when what we really need is community?
4. If you have been seeking to have a "faith word" shape your life this past week, how did it go? What was it, what did it mean to live by grace, love, hope, mercy, compassion, faith....? Did you find that the word opened, for you, what it meant to live as a child of God, to live from your baptismal identity? Any stories to tell, or images to share with your group? If you are reflecting on this alone, perhaps keep a journal for a month with a faith word to shape you – how did it open you to God and to your family, friends and neighbors?
5. Return to this beautiful hymn about our baptismal identity. If you read it from the perspective of suffering, of our brokenness, how do these first three verses really take on deeper meaning? What do you hear, what might be a prayer that sustains you?

### Baptized and Set Free

- 1        We are people created,  
chosen by God.  
          Then we're washed, ever gently,  
in mercy and love.  
          Sin has power no more.  
Jesus opened the door  
          to a fountain bringing healing,  
and wholeness and more.
- 2        We are fed and we're nourished,  
filled and refreshed.  
          Then our hunger returns and  
again we are blessed.  
          For whatever the need,  
God is greater indeed:  
          endless ocean, always deeper  
than all of our need.
- 3        We are nourished by water,  
all living things,

and by life that the Spirit  
abundantly brings.  
As we journey toward home,  
may your presence be known:  
precious river, ever-flowing,  
now carry us home.

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6. "The good that I would is not the good that I do," when have you been confronted by this in your life? How does the challenge of our brokenness find hope in Christian community? What is the role of the Church community in encouraging us when we struggle with our personal suffering and challenging us when our pride or arrogance causes others to suffer? What does it mean that we are all children of God, that none of us is exempt from suffering or from God's grace and love?

# Wednesday, November 1

## Evening Prayer and Hymn

## Welcome and Christ Care Prayers

## Your questions from the reading, insights and opening comments

## Salvation... Grace... Identity... Suffering... Singing

Today we turn to Romans 10, and the gracious Word that sets our hearts singing: "The same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him." It is grounded in the good news that has been shared with you and me: Jesus loves you, died and was raised for you, and this Jesus calls you child of God. It is a Word that we need to hear each day, a Word that comes to us from the outside. It is the Word of God's love and mercy for you. Your salvation is in Christ Jesus, by grace as a gift. You are healed and forgiven because you are called a child of God. Even, and especially, in the midst of suffering, we know of God's love – so how can we keep from singing?

### How can I keep from singing?

#### Romans 9: 1-18

Paul's heartbreak and yet trust in the adoptive power of God.

Verse 6 – the Word of God has not failed

7-8 – being children of God depends on promise, election (Genesis 21:12)

Are there any adoptive parents here? Do you love you adopted children any less than your biological kids, or any more?

Verse 16 – Finally, it depends on God...

#### Romans 9: 9-29

Paul makes the inspired move, God is free to elect and elects both Gentiles and Jews.

Paul roots his understanding in scripture, Hosea 1:10 and 2:23 – in verses 25-26.

#### Romans 9: 30- 10:4

The irony is that the Gentiles have found God's righteousness through faith, where Israel missed it by relying on works (on their own powers).

Romans 10:3 – a key, we do seek to live by our power, rather than by God's grace...

#### Romans 10: 5-21

Salvation is for all... verse 4, which makes the refusal of the good and gracious news of God even more tragic (for Gentile and Jew).

It is a nuanced argument, but if you want to live by your works, well, good luck... for there is not end to the demands of the law.... But in the arms of Christ, there is peace and perspective - salvation (verse 9).

How do we hear, how do we believe, what do we need to hear? (verses 14 and following).

#### Romans 11: 1-10

Israel's rejection is not final... by no means! God does not erase Israel's election because the majority has disobeyed. Verse 3 – if even one has faith....

#### Romans 11: 11-24

Salvation of the gentiles (Acts 13:44-48; 28: 25-29 – Jewish rejection and Gentile mission)

Verse 17 and following, a warning about arrogance... grafted onto the tree...

Romans 11: 25-36

No not claim to be wiser than you are.... It is a mystery... verse 29, "the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable...."

So, in the midst of so many things we cannot understand, in the face of challenges when we want to be right... what does it mean to surrender in faith, to allow room for God to work... and could that be what it means to "give God the glory?"

So here we are, at a turning point in Paul's letter. Recall that we began with the conversation on our sinfulness and God's righteousness: Romans 1-5. We continued with suffering and the hope we have in Christ: Romans 6-9. We have now arrived at mission, God's mission to save the world. Dripping wet, again, in the boat, we say thank you – we give God the glory.

### **For next week – devotional reading**

Day One: Romans 12: 1-21

Day Two: Romans 13: 1-14

Day Three: Romans 14: 1-12

Day Four: Romans 14: 13-23

Day Five: Romans 15: 1-13

Day Six: Romans 15: 14-33

Day Seven: Romans 16: 1-27

### **Further discussion and reflection questions:**

1. Who shared God's love with you? Who has been a person filled with God's grace and love in your life? Take some time to reflect on the faith people in your life who shared God's love and mercy with you? How did they share the faith? How have they been the "beautiful feet" of the messenger for you? Yes, where to even begin with a list of the messengers of God's love in our lives! Take some time to make a list of the "beautiful feet" in your life.
2. Who do you share God's love with? Who are the people in your life that you have the privilege of sharing the good news with? How do we celebrate, affirm and bless our loved ones, family and friends? Can you list and discuss the many ways of sharing God's love? Yes, it can certainly be in telling the great story of Jesus life, death and new life; but it is also in our listening, caring and blessing? How are you called to heal, bless, build up, forgive and love – in Jesus' name?
3. If you have been seeking to have a "faith word" shape your life this past week, how did it go? What was it, what did it mean to live by grace, love, hope, mercy, compassion, faith....? Did you find that the word opened, for you, what it meant to live as a child of God, to live from your baptismal identity? Any stories to tell, or images to share with your group? If you are reflecting on this alone, perhaps keep a journal for a month with a faith word to shape you – how did it open you to God and to your family, friends and neighbors?
4. Here is a new hymn to reflect on and perhaps discuss. It was written in the midst of great suffering, and yet through the suffering the composer knew that God's grace had been spoken in his life. Take a

moment to read the hymn, and then we can talk about what you hear, what inspires you or opens you to God's grace at work.

### **My Life Flows On in Endless Song**

1 My life flows on in endless song;  
above earth's lamentation,  
I catch the sweet, though far-off hymn  
that hails a new creation.

#### *Refrain*

No storm can shake my inmost calm  
while to that Rock I'm clinging.  
Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth,  
how can I keep from singing?

2 Through all the tumult and the strife,  
I hear that music ringing.  
It finds an echo in my soul.  
How can I keep from singing? *Refrain*

3 What though my joys and comforts die?  
The Lord my Savior liveth.  
What though the darkness gather round?  
Songs in the night he giveth. *Refrain*

4 The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart,  
a fountain ever springing!  
All things are mine since I am his!  
How can I keep from singing? *Refrain*

Text: Robert Lowry, 1826-1899

## Wednesday, November 8

### Evening Prayer and Hymn

### Welcome and Christ Care Prayers

### Your questions from the reading, insights and opening comments

### Salvation... Grace... Identity... Suffering... Singing... Seeing

We arrive at the final conversation, for now, on the remarkable letter of Paul to the Romans. Paul's proclamation is clear: Jesus loves you, died and was raised for you, and this Jesus calls you child of God. You are saved by grace as a gift. The response to the grace of God is the instinctive gratitude: thank you! There in the boat with Jesus he calls you child of God. This identity as the children of God sustains us in suffering, opens us to the song of faith and finally reveals that faith is a way of seeing.

### Faith is a way of seeing – what do we see?

Faith is a way of seeing. It is a way that begins in gratitude, for us, the people pulled from death to life by Jesus Christ. Think about any situation, relationship, opportunity or challenge in life, how is it transformed by first living by gratitude?

Imagine starting into any situation by first thanking God and being open to the pathway of gratitude. How has a heart of gratitude changed situations you have been in, how has it opened or transformed your life?

### Romans 12: 1-21

The new life in Christ is rooted in gratitude... how does this transform? What if a sense of gratitude is our spiritual worship (vs 1)

How does gratitude draw us to humility, of not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought? In verse 3 Paul invites us into the reflection on the variety of gifts....

What is the true mark of the Christian? Love, verse 9...

How is this love active, blessing, verse 14 and following...

Verse 19 is interesting, leave room for God – in love and wrath (remember, not anger, but more so a “righting.”)

The famous burning coals of love.... Verse 20-21

### Romans 13: 1-14

Civic life... verse 7 is a good summation for our civic life... how is this helpful in a time when all tax seems to be demonized (don't we want good roads, police, fire, good schools...) Is the tax problem a symptom of the deeper challenge Paul alludes to, the loss of respect for various offices in our society, the loss of honor?

Here in the midst of this reflection, Paul returns to love... again, at verse 8.

It is love that fulfills the law... The appeal becomes urgent at verse 11.

Romans 14: 1-12

When we see, we live by faith active in love, we...

Welcome, verse 1

Do not pass judgments, verse 4

Do not live to ourselves, verse 7

Why do you pass judgment, verse 10

Romans 14: 13-23

Resolve to not let others stumble... what hindrances do we put in front of others, what do we think of as the essentials that might actually be hindrances (at Church, in our relationships, in our neighborhood, community and world)?

What is the kingdom of God: righteousness (saved by grace), peace and joy, verse 17

Let us pursue what makes for peace, verse 19

Romans 15: 1-13

The strong care for the weak... we are to live in harmony....

The deepest call of the follower of Jesus Christ is community, harmony, that "with one voice" we glorify God? What if the endless, tireless pursuit of harmony, of common ground and shared vision is the center?

Welcome... again at verse 7, he summarizes the whole letter here, and seems to conclude at verse 13...

Romans 15: 14-33

Paul reflects on his past ministry, and looks to the future.

Romans 16: 1-27

Personal greetings and close of the letter...

At verse 17 – interesting to note his insight into dissensions to the teaching – the teaching of saved by grace as a gift, a salvation that is grounded in love, a faith that sees the way of welcome, peace and building up the community, a life of thanksgiving and care for one another, a way that transcends the judgments and seeks for the strong to care for the weak, and a life lived together by faith in the One who has done all this for us.

**Further discussion and reflection questions:**

1. How do you understand that faith is a way of seeing, grounded in a life of gratitude? How has gratitude transformed your life? How has gratitude transformed the way you live and relate to family and friends? What might a Church community rooted in gratitude look like, act like?
2. Faith is a way of seeing. We see through the lens of love, not power. So often faith becomes a position of power or being personally "right;" faith is a way of service, humility, and generosity. Where are you tempted to see through the lens of power, when are you tempted to being "right," or to strength that can

lead to judgment and attempts to control? How have you been led back to the way of seeing by faith that resists judgment, sees those who need our love and encouragement, our support and affirmation?

3. Faith as a way of seeing seeks to build up community, to include and expand. Where have you seen communities exclude and diminish, have you been on the receiving end of the power or “rightness” that excludes or diminishes? Have you found yourself, often surprisingly, in the place of the power or strength that excluded, judged or brought diminishment? Interesting to note that the very word, diminish, is rooted in dimming – a darkening where sight is lost. Faith that is a way of seeing is the way of love that welcomes, thanks and seeks to expand. In this there is light. Where and when have you experienced this light? Who are the people that “brighten” a room, not by their power, but by a sense of love and generosity? When are you that light? What is the commission given in baptism, to you, to all... “let you light so shine that they may see your good works (love, generosity, gratitude) and give glory to God.”

4. If you have been seeking to have a “faith word” shape your life during this study, what have you learned. How did the word open your faith to a way of seeing? How might this faith word continue to guide you? What encouragement do you need from family and friends to continue on this way of seeing? One way to continue is to keep a daily journal, which is a great faith exercise and help for faith as a way of seeing.

**Finally... thank you, for your faith, sight and commitment to this faith community.**

**Resources that shaped these materials:**

*Paul’s Letter to the Romans, A Commentary*, by Arland J. Hultgren; William B Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2011

*The Epistle to the Romans*, by Douglas J Moo, William B Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996

*Lectures on Romans*, Martin Luther, Luther’s Works Volume 25, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1972

*Romans Leader Session Guide: Book of Faith*, Matthew Marhol, Augsburg Fortress, 2009