

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost

August 30, 2020

Psalm: Psalm 26:1–12 (ESV)

1 Vindicate me, O LORD,

for I have walked in my integrity,

and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.

2 Prove me, O LORD, and try me;

test my heart and my mind.

3 For your steadfast love is before my eyes,

and I walk in your faithfulness.

4 I do not sit with men of falsehood,

nor do I consort with hypocrites.

5 I hate the assembly of evildoers,

and I will not sit with the wicked.

6 I wash my hands in innocence

and go around your altar, O LORD,

7 proclaiming thanksgiving aloud,

and telling all your wondrous deeds.

8 O LORD, I love the habitation of your house

and the place where your glory dwells.

9 Do not sweep my soul away with sinners,

nor my life with bloodthirsty men,

10 in whose hands are evil devices,

and whose right hands are full of bribes.

11 But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity;

redeem me, and be gracious to me.

12 My foot stands on level ground;

in the great assembly I will bless the LORD.

Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 15:15–21 (ESV)

15 O LORD, you know;

remember me and visit me,
and take vengeance for me on my persecutors.

In your forbearance take me not away;
know that for your sake I bear reproach.

16 Your words were found, and I ate them,
and your words became to me a joy
and the delight of my heart,
for I am called by your name,
O LORD, God of hosts.

17 I did not sit in the company of revelers,
nor did I rejoice;
I sat alone, because your hand was upon me,
for you had filled me with indignation.

18 Why is my pain unceasing,
my wound incurable,
refusing to be healed?
Will you be to me like a deceitful brook,
like waters that fail?

19 Therefore thus says the LORD:

“If you return, I will restore you,
and you shall stand before me.

If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless,

you shall be as my mouth.

They shall turn to you,

but you shall not turn to them.

20 And I will make you to this people

a fortified wall of bronze;

they will fight against you,

but they shall not prevail over you,

for I am with you

to save you and deliver you,

declares the LORD.

21 I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked,

and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.”

EPISTLE: Romans 12:9–21 (ESV)

9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” 20 To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so

doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

THE GOSPEL: Matthew 16:21–28 (ESV)

21 From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. **22** And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” **23** But he turned and said to Peter, “**Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.**”

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, “**If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. 28 Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.**”

Sermon 33 – Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

“Do What Are”

Romans 12:9-21

Dear friends,

We know Jesus makes us who we are, but we are also part of this. It is not willingness precisely that makes a Christian, a Christian has to be forcibly rebuilt. It is not our work that makes us who we are, we say that constantly. It is God's work. But we are working here, we are the ones struggling here. Paul juggles these concepts and more in our epistle lesson today. What do we owe God, what is God doing in us, and what do we owe our fellowman? These are all questions Paul answers, and he kinda mixes them all up. As nicely as Romans is laid out sometimes,

the Christian faith is not always easily broken into categories as you'll see. Not many questions to ask this one, just kinda taking it in and soaking it in. Jesus gives us faith, He gives us works, we do those works. Who gets credit? Jesus does, which He then passes on to us.

Paul has spent most of Romans laying out the faith in a straightforward fashion, but as he gets into chapter 10 and beyond, he begins talking about an issue specific to the churches of the time. I've talked about this a fair bit, so this isn't what the sermon is about today, but as you know the church had quite a time figuring out how to integrate the Jews and the Gentiles into one church. What Paul deals with in our text today is part of that. When you have human separations in the church and in society you get misunderstandings, you get ego, you get greed, and all that other pretty awful stuff that we're so good at. Paul spends much of the time leading up to this warning the Romans not to get too full of themselves. Don't get haughty. Don't get uppity. You aren't special.

It's a nice message if you're like me and need serious humbling from time to time. Here's what Paul says: **“9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.”** The antidote for self-centeredness is generosity and thankfulness. The antidote for ego is empathy, consideration, and so forth. Jesus demonstrated absolutely all of these to perfection as He does, but as Jesus' children we are to follow in His wake and be the same way. That's why Paul says these things. Jesus again leads the charge, He does it first, then He passes on this kind of selfless righteousness to us. He changes our hearts so that this reflects from us because this is what we are.

But does it? That's what makes this tricky. You all do good works, I've seen them. You do them. You. My good works are things that I do. I have to try to do them, I have to make the deliberate choice. I have to do the actual work. Same for you. We're doing it, yet Jesus is the one behind it. Both are especially evident when you have to force them, when you have to set your teeth together and do the good thing even if its the last thing you want to do. Paul talks about this a little bit. He wants our love to be genuine. Genuine love comes from a genuinely loving heart,

and that is something that only God can build in us. Our hearts and our selves are divided, we want one thing but have to do another. Worse, if you're like me, you want one thing but wish you wanted another. You wish you were another. That's what the whole of Romans chapter 7 is about, Paul realizing that what is inside him is all mixed up.

Are your good works yours? No. They were begun by Christ. He did them first, and moreover Paul says that He set you in your place to do them. Are they God's? No. God isn't the one doing them, you are. Our sense tells us it has to be one or the other, but Paul says it is both and it is neither. You do the good things you do, pretending otherwise seems rather silly when you actually go out and do them. But the reason you do those things is because Christ has already done them to you and set them up for you. But Christ isn't doing them, you are.

Why is it so confusing? Why is it so nonsensical? It has to be because its human, but more to the point it has to be to strip us of our pride. We cannot honestly say that we do the good works we do. That we are such great Christian people because look what I did. We can't. Jesus makes sure of that, and that's one of the most important parts of Paul's words here. Paul says these things to remind His people, to remind you, we have no basis for our pride. Our pride is the problem, Paul reminds us, our chest-thumping, finger-pointing nature is our sin, not our Christianity. It's always there, though, because we're always a part of it, but God wants us to always be a part of it.

God's ability to accept us has always been a mystery to me. God is perfect, He is the very definition of what good is, yet He takes sinners like us and works around them to such a massively puzzling extent it almost seems self-defeating. God wants us to do good, God repeatedly tells us to do good, we are not good, so even when we do good it feels forced or fake. But what Paul is telling you is that God makes us good so that the good we do to others isn't ours, but His. Like a relay race, we accept what is given to us, we run with it for a while, and then we pass it on to others. Both good works and the good news. **“11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation,**

be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.”

It's not your good, Paul tells you. None of this you can do or take pride in on your own. Serving the Lord is generic, but as I have told you, the Lord wants you to serve Him by serving His children, and Paul is illustrating this. Hospitality and contribution are just the litmus tests of the good that Christ has levied on to you. The things that Jesus Himself has accomplished in you. Jesus was hospitable to you, He invited you in, despite the fact that you didn't want it and would much rather do it on your own. Paul gives you a mold that you cannot meet, and even when you can get one of these things done, you realize that the only reason you did it was that Christ did it for you.

“14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” 20 To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Paul does not hesitate to label sin what it is, it is evil, and that is bad. But Paul takes that to break down our pride. Sin reminds us of the world we live in, more to the point, sin reminds us of who we are. We are sin. All these commands, these exhortations, they're good things to do, but they're hard things to do because sin still is in us and still rules over our bodies. One of the many reasons God leaves Christians in this world is keep them humble, to keep them needy, to remind them that they are what they hate. I've said that you to you before, but it bears repeating. You are what makes you mad. There's a lot to be mad about these days, a lot to lecture and shout and fight over. Carelessness, heartlessness, treachery, greed, the news services love to point the spotlight at the worst of human nature and we see

it. Paul reminds us that what we are seeing is ourselves in God's own spotlight. But Paul doesn't say these words to condemn, he says them to inspire hope. Paul is not telling you all this in Romans to make you feel bad. Paul is telling you this in order to tell you what you are and what Christ has done.

The virtues listed here are many and awesome. None of the ridiculous pride, none of the mememe that dominates our world. We feel shame because we can't exercise these things without help, and Paul says that help is there and has already come. Christ's harmony with sinful human beings is yours. Christ's hospitality, His mercy, His empathy, and His repaying evil with good is all yours. He repaid your evil with His good, He smeared the story of your life with His white-out and wrote a whole new story in its place. Try to do these things. Do. As you try, you remember that this is a description as well as a command. This is Jesus, and Jesus is in you, He is what you are now. His righteousness is yours, His mercy is yours. These words aren't there to inspire you, inspiration always fades. These words are there to promise you and to make you, and they make you Jesus' child in His glory.

Amen