

Worship

September 17, 2023

9:30 a.m. St. Andrew's, Mooretown

11:00 a.m., Knox-Moore

**Indicates to please stand as you are able.*

God calls us to worship:

Call to worship:

We respond in praise and confession:

*Hymn: #479 "The church's one foundation"

Prayer of praise and supplication:

Gracious God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
gentle in your power and
strong in your tenderness,
you have brought us forth
from the womb of your being
and breathed into us the breath of life.
We know that we do not live by bread alone
but by every word that comes from you.
Feed our deep hungers with the living bread
that you give us in Jesus Christ
through the encouragement of your Scriptures.
Make us a joyful company of your people
so that with the faithful in every place and time
we may praise and honour you,
O God most high.
Amen.

Prayer of confession (*unison*):

**God of mercy:
Although we have found peace in Christ,
we are a people divided against ourselves
as we cling to the values of a broken world.**

**You have given us hope
through the gospel of Jesus Christ,
but too often the cares of the world weigh us down,
and despair comes upon us.**

**You have given us joyful assurance
in the wonder of your presence among us,
but too often we become mired in the mundane
and lose the gift of reverence.**

**By your saving power, O God,
enable us to celebrate your love for us
with joy and thanksgiving. Amen.**

God speaks to us:

We hear the gospel of God's grace: Romans 8:1; 2 Corinthians 5:17, 21
(The response to: "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good" is, "**His love endures forever**")

*Hymn: #530 "I come with joy"

For the glory of God

Paul wrote this letter to the Roman Christians to serve, in part, as an introduction. Although he had never visited Rome, he had heard of the Christian's faith and wanted to visit the church in order to preach Christ among them *and* to be encouraged by them. We glean from the closing chapters, that Paul was at a turning point in his ministry. He felt as though he had done all he could in the eastern territories and now set his sights on bringing the gospel of Jesus to "the ends of the world". Which meant, from his perspective, Spain. So, his plan was to make one more trip to Jerusalem in order to deliver the money that the congregations in other cities had collected to the impoverished saints in Judea and then to travel to Spain, stopping along the way in Rome to visit the church there.

READ: Romans 15:1-13, 20-33; 16:25-27
(The response to: "This is the word of the Lord" is, "**Thanks be to God**")

Humanity's highest purpose is to joyfully reveal to the world the true character of the God who creates, sustains, and redeems all life; to whom we belong and who we worship as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

If you were raised on the Westminster Shorter Catechism, you will doubtless recall the very first question and answer:

*What is the chief end of man?
Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.*

To glorify something/someone is to truthfully represent them to others and to value them for what/who they truly are.

If I were to take this pen and describe it to you as a cylindrical plastic tube containing a bunch of unnecessary brick-a-brack, and then if I were to throw away the lid, nib, end cap, and ink cartridge, stuff in a small ball of paper and use it as a

pea shooter, I would not be glorifying the pen because I did not truthfully represent it to you nor did I value it for what it rightly is.

To glorify something/someone is to truthfully represent them to others and to value them for what/who they truly are.

in what we just read Paul described the act of glorifying God as the Christian's highest purpose and what he desired to be the focus of the Christians in Rome:

*... so that together you may with one voice **glorify** the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (15:6)*

*Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the **glory** of God. (15:7)*

*...in order that the Gentiles might **glorify** God for his mercy. (15:9)*

and finally:

*Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith – to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the **glory** forever! (17:25-27)*

The differences in tradition and beliefs held by the Jewish and Gentile members of the Roman church were threatening the harmony of the community and thus their collective *witness* to Christ's Kingdom and the presence, power, grace, and mercy of God.

This has sounded as a pedal tone throughout the letter.

The Jewish side condemned the Gentiles for disrespecting the covenants and their ancestors while the Gentile side condemned the Jews for legalism (such as insisting on and undermining the free grace of Christ).

Throughout the letter, Paul stressed that the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the "power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" (1:16) "brings together Jews as God's chosen people and the Gentiles as honorary [adopted] Jews to blend their voices in praise to God."

Paul was driven, at least in part, by a vision of a new body of humanity in which Jew and Gentile alike, growing out of the New Adam (who is Jesus of Nazareth) are united by the Holy Spirit in praise and glory of the Living God.

What is at stake is God's reputation.

If the people who represent the Living God are known only by their disagreements and infighting, by their grudges and jealousies, by their pride and fears, what does that tell the world about the character of the God to whom they belong and who they claim to worship?

They're taking something that can write stories of untold grace, mercy, and peace and using Him as a peashooter!

Paul wrote that by Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross the Father has forgiven sin and reconciles all humanity to Himself – whether Jewish or Gentile. What is required on our part is faith in Christ; in his incarnation, crucifixion (and the effectiveness of it), bodily resurrection, ascension, and coming again to reclaim His kingdom on earth as in heaven.

However, with the church divided, the witness of the community is falsified. How can the world get to know the God of love, grace, and mercy if the people who bear his name are ensnared in bickering, grudge-holding, jealousies, and contempt?!

And, Paul believed his vision wasn't just wishful thinking. It was hope. It was the sure and certain assurance that one day Jew and Gentile alike *will* bow the knee to Christ and with one voice *will* praise and glorify the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, he tirelessly urged the Romans to likewise embrace that vision in the here-and-now and find ways to gather in worship and live in harmony, in accordance with Christ, and by the encouragement of the scriptures, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What is at stake in the way the Christian community conducts its affairs and relates to one another is the reputation, the *glory*, of the Living God.

*If the people who represent the Living God are known instead by their harmony, compassion, hope, hospitality, and worship despite their differences, what does **that** tell the world about the character of the God to whom they belong and who they claim to worship?*

The church is the beacon of the presence and power; of the grace and mercy of the Living God who we know in, with, and through Jesus the Christ.

In an increasingly polarized and suspicious society, the church – as the body of Christ – represents the God who unites Jew and Gentile in worship through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ by which we are justified when we receive his grace in faith and sanctified by the Holy Spirit who dwells within each of us and speaks to our hearts and minds through the ancient words of Scripture.

The church is the beacon of the presence and power; of the grace and mercy of the Living God who we know in, with, and through Jesus Christ.

How we interact with each other; how we talk about each other – how we *build up* our neighbours even, or perhaps especially, our neighbours we don't particularly like but can still recognize as fellow Christians and siblings-in-Christ will tell others something of the character of the God to whom we belong and who we worship.

It's one thing for a preacher to paint a vibrant picture of a glorious vision of harmony and hospitality wherein all people join their voices to sing God's praises in the name of Jesus Christ! It's another thing to see that vision realized. I wonder if Paul ever experienced the realization of this vision amongst the Christians in Rome.

We don't know for sure if Paul ever made it to Rome as a free man. His life's timeline does allow for the possibility, but we don't know. Nor do we know if he made it to Spain, which was his intent. Although, there are some non-Biblical sources that suggest he did. We *do* know that he did come to Rome as a prisoner. First under house arrest and later in chains awaiting his execution as a martyr.

But if he ever saw his vision realized, I don't know.

My guess is that there probably were movements toward it, but that the separation between factions continued to cause friction within the community.

The transformation of the Christian community will be completed when Christ returns at the marriage of heaven and earth. That day is nearer than when we first became believers! However, it has not yet arrived.

In the present age between Christ's resurrection and return, the beginning of the transformation depends upon the transformation of individual hearts and minds.

It depends upon you and me allowing the Holy Spirit to renew our private minds through the Word of God so that we can discern God's good, acceptable, and perfect will, in whatever our circumstances and in whatever interaction we find ourselves, and be transformed to respond not according to the values of the world but according to Christ's holiness and righteousness.

For the glory of God.

Amen.

We respond in faith, offering, and prayer:

*Affirmation of Faith: The Apostles' Creed

*Offering:

(Offering plates are presented at the Communion Table while singing:)

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
praise him all creatures here below;
praise him above, ye heavenly host;
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.**

*Prayer of dedication

Prayer of Thanksgiving, Intercession, and the Lord's Prayer:

God of authority and authenticity,
we come before you today, glad to know you give us the chance to change our
lives
when we have wandered away from your purposes.
We give you thanks for the encouragement and support we receive from
friends in Christ,
here in our church and wherever we meet them.
We thank you for relationships that have grown stronger
through the courage to forgive which you inspire in us.
Use us as signs and servants of the new possibilities you create.
God of changed hearts,
Renew the future for us all.

Christ our Companion,
make our community one that lives out your grace and mercy.
Today we pray for those among us and around us who are struggling to live
wisely and well,
who seek a way of integrity for the future.
We pray for those who are confronting addictions
or trying to change old habits that are harmful to health:
give them persistence and support
We pray for those who want to end violence and anger in their lives:
give them courage and wisdom to walk a new way
God of changed hearts,
Renew the future for us all.

We pray for those who have broken the law and now seek to make amends:
teach them good judgement in action and relationships.
We pray for those who have broken their word and want to rebuild trust and
integrity:
show them how to take responsibility and live it out.
God of changed hearts,
Renew the future for us all.

We pray for those who are seeking new work, learning new skills, or changing
employment:
open new opportunities for them.
We pray for all of us who seek new ways to live out our faith
in this church and in this community:

help us communicate God's love in fresh ways so others catch the vision of your love.

God of changed hearts,

Renew the future for us all.

And we pray in silence for all those for whom the week ahead will hold deep challenges,

and who need your support and ours, to face what the days will bring

Keep silence for 15 seconds

Spirit of transforming power, work in us and in all for whom we pray, as we sum up our prayers in the words Jesus taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

God sends us to serve and witness

with God's blessing:

*Hymn: #477 "Your hand, O God, has guided"

Benediction

Congregational Amen