

Worship

September 3, 2023

10:00 a.m.

Knox, Moore



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

God calls us to worship:

Call to worship: Psalm 105

*Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name,
make known his deeds among the peoples.*

He is the Lord our God;

his judgments are in all the earth.

*He is mindful of his covenant forever,
of the word that he commanded,
for a thousand generations.*

Let us praise the Lord!

We respond in praise and confession:

*Hymn: #461 “Be thou my vision”

Prayer of praise and supplication:

Holy, Mysterious, Eternal and Ever-loving God,
In you we live and move and have our being.
You are the beginning and end of all things.
In your depth, we find mystery.
In your breadth, we know your tender embrace.
We can only wonder at your love for us,
so small a part of your whole creation are we.
Yet in Jesus Christ we meet your generous grace.
In the Holy Spirit, you move with us to inspire our action
and fill us with hope.
Our thoughts cannot exhaust your wisdom,
nor can our hearts fathom your mercy.
And so, we worship you in humble praise,
Holy God, ever Three and ever One, now and always.

Prayer of confession (*unison*):

**Faithful and forgiving God,
we confess we do not live out your love and mercy.
We cling to old hurts and familiar habits.
We nurse anger and envy.
we refuse to allow your grace to transform our actions and renew
our minds.
Forgive what we have been, amend who we are,
and guide us toward who we may become
according to your generous grace.**

God speaks to us:

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

*Hymn: #508 "Your word, O God, awoke the uncreated"

Scripture: Romans 12:1-21
(The response to: "This is the word of the Lord" is, "**Thanks be to God**")

Because of the gospel

Because of the gospel “we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.”

This is the conclusion at which Paul arrived after having written 11 chapters of his letter to the Christian church in Rome. He began the chapter with the word “Therefore”: “I appeal to you *therefore* ...” In other words, because of everything that has happened before, here is my conclusion. He then urged the reader to not blend in with the societal norms and expectations that are contrary to God’s wisdom, will, and law as revealed in Scripture but to be transformed by the renewing of one’s mind so that we may be able to figure out what is right according to the Holy and Just God’s design. Then, he began to unpack what this all means in terms of one’s relationship with the Christian community.

Because of the gospel:

Because God is real, good, and able,

Because God took the initiative for salvation,

Because sin is forgiven and, together with death and the devil have no authority to exercise their power over our emotions, intellect, nor actions,

Because Gentiles are grafted into the Holy Family Tree through our faith in Christ, his atoning sacrifice, his bodily resurrection, and his ascended Lordship,

Because of the gospel we are reconciled with our heavenly Father and, in Him, through Christ, in the mystery of the Holy Spirit, we are reconciled to one another.

*Because of the gospel we, who are many, are one body **in Christ**, and individually we are members one of another.*

Here we have to remember the context in which Paul wrote this letter.

He began by proclaiming his belief that the gospel is the very *power of God* to affect salvation in everyone who believes. What this means is that the *message* of God – his reality, his goodness, his providence; of Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross; of the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit, as revealed in

Scripture – when applied to our daily circumstances over the course of our natural lives is the means by which God brings about our healing, our peace, our fellowship with God, our joy, and our eternal life.

He then discussed the reality of sin which he defined as the failure to honour God as God, the failure to give thanks to Him, and the tendency of human beings, demonstrated by Adam and Eve's transgression, to consider ourselves wise unto ourselves and therefore not in need of supernatural help. The consequence of this is that we begin to elevate the created world – even ourselves – to divine status which results in selfishness, pride, greed, jealousy, unholy sexual practices, anger, and violence.

Because God is perfectly just, He cannot allow sin to continue unaddressed, so, for the sake of His glory and the good of the creation He loves, sin had to be dealt with. This was done by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, wrote Paul, anyone who places their faith in God's reality, and goodness, in the efficacy of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, in the reality of his physical resurrection, and in the authority of his lordship is declared by the holy and righteous judge to be justified. Innocent.

And, yet, as Paul explored in chapters 5-8, although we are justified by faith and live with the hope of the resurrection when the creation itself is restored to glory, we continue to live in an age in which sin tries to get the upper hand – evil still tries to overcome the good. And so, Paul wrote about sanctification. The process by which, through the Holy Spirit within us, God makes us more and more into the image Christ and enables us to overcome evil with God's good.

In the middle part of the letter, chapters 9 – 11, Paul addressed the particular context of the Roman Christians. There was friction in the church because some of the members came from a Jewish upbringing, others from a Gentile upbringing. The Jewish Christians thought they were more holy because of their connection with Abraham and the covenants. The Gentiles thought they were more holy because they were freed from all the tradition. Paul reminded them that both groups were equally holy *in Christ*. Gentiles stand on the shoulders of the Jewish ancestors and the Jewish Christians learn about the primacy of faith in Christ alone from the Gentiles.

Which brings us to chapter 12 in which Paul began to talk about how the gospel works itself out in our communal living.

Paul argued that the new communion between Jews and Gentiles, united in their mutual faith in Jesus Christ is the new temple. There are no more sacrifices to be made in the temple because Christ's is the final and all-encompassing blood sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. Instead, believers offer themselves as *living* sacrifices so that, through our communal lives, God's presence is revealed in the world.

The church is the beacon of God's presence, power, grace, and mercy in the world.

Which is what the temple foreshadowed.

How we behave toward one another within the community, as well as with those outside the church – especially those who are enemies of the church – tells others about the character of the God to whom we belong and who we worship.

So, Paul urged the members of the church, as the one body in Christ composed of diverse members to use one's gifts for building up the faith of one's siblings in Christ. Practice genuine love and encouragement as you urge each other, because you care for each other, to continue deepening and expanding one's faith – one's knowledge of, love of, and trust in Christ. Practice hospitality to strangers and generosity toward one another. Be patient and persevere in the faith. As much as it's possible in accordance with God's Word in scripture, seek harmony within the community, embrace grace and mercy instead of holding grudges, and trust God to right all wrongs according to His perfect Justice.

Thus, we will reveal to the world the grace, mercy, and justice of God.

However, none of this is possible without the transforming power of the Holy Spirit that is given only when we encounter the living and ascended Lord Jesus, the Christ.

If we try to build this community in our own strength it will only serve to glorify our own ideals and will, eventually, crumble as pride, jealousy, and greed supplant our good intentions. And, in the process, we'll probably burn out.

God is glorified when God's people live by God's power alone.

I appeal to you therefore brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and

*acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed** by the **renewing of your minds**, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Because of the gospel, we don't need to try and live and build community in our own strength. Because of the gospel the Holy Spirit dwells within, guiding, prompting, and strengthening us to do God's work in our present reality.

Therefore, because of the gospel, urged Paul, allow God to exercise His power over your minds so that by your transformed actions and relations with one another, you would faithfully reflect God's glory, and the church would be the beacon of His presence and grace as it's meant to be.

The church is in a precarious situation right now.

And, in our own congregations, maybe you feel that vulnerability even more in light of my announcement last week. Perhaps you're wondering how long the church will continue and what the future will hold.

Well, I don't know.

However, scripture assures us, that if you're willing to believe the Holy Spirit is real, powerful, and keen to do Christ's work within you; if you're willing to allow the Holy Spirit to renew your mind and transform your thoughts, speech, and action, you will encounter the very power of God that works all things together for salvation and His good.

If you're willing to believe the gospel, believe the Holy Spirit is real and powerful, and allow the Holy Spirit to renew your mind and transform your behaviour, God will do amazing things through you and through our congregations.

But it will probably come at a cost.

Paul urged us to make of ourselves *living sacrifices*. These are not sacrifices to affect salvation – Christ made the final blood sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin! Rather, these are the acts of giving up what prevents the Holy Spirit from renewing our minds and transforming our behaviours: beliefs that are inconsistent with the Word of God, grudges, pride, ingratitude. The living sacrifice is the offering of our emotions, mind, and bodily self to God to be used by the Holy Spirit in revealing the grace and truth of Christ to the world in which we live.

For the good of the world, the health of ourselves, and 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

The Sacrament of Holy Communion

Invitation to the Lord's Table

*Hymn #528 "Jesus calls us here to meet him"

Prayer of Thanksgiving: #564

Breaking of Bread

Communion

Prayer

**God sends us to serve and witness
with God's blessing:**

*Hymn: #652 "Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go"

Benediction

Congregational Amen