

Devotions for the Week of July 14, 2019
YOU GOT MAIL: A Journey Through Paul's Letters
Transformed - A Letter to the Church in Rome
North East United Methodist Church
By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Sunday, July 14, 2019

Perhaps you are reading this devotion having been a Christian for many years, perhaps you just recently accepted Jesus Christ into your heart, or perhaps you are still seeking, trying to understand the gift that is being offered.

This week we want to talk about salvation, the gift of love God offers us through Jesus Christ. Regardless of where you are, it is important to be reminded of the love God has shown us through His Son and to think about our relationship with Him.

Let us travel this week what is called the "Roman Road."

Read Romans 3:23. It all begins here with the recognition that we "*all fall short*" to God's "*glorious standard.*" We have all said, "Nobody's Perfect." It's true. Nobody is perfect, but God is. We are all painfully aware of our own sinful nature; we may not want to reflect on it much, but we are aware that it exists. We screw up! Take selfishness for example. Andy Stanley writes,

"And as much trouble as our selfishness gets us into, we continue to bow to it. It chokes the love out of marriages. It drives a wedge between parents and their adolescent kids. It lures men and women

outside the boundaries of common sense in the arena of personal finances. It fuels ambition to the point of self-destruction. And after several millennia of human experience, we still have not found a way to rid ourselves of this taskmaster. What we need is to be, well saved. We need to be saved, or delivered, from the thing that rages inside us. And we need to be forgiven for all the hurt we have caused as a result of our sin. Jesus came to this earth to be both deliverer and forgiver. No one else in recorded history has every claimed to be either of those, much less both."

Many people will either not come to church or when they come to church and hear of Jesus will not come forward to invite Him into their lives because they say, "I'm not worthy of God's love." The answer to that is "You're right! You're not worthy. No one is. But God loves you anyway."

We "*all fall short*" and we all need a Savior. Take time to lift your sins, your faults, your hurts, your past mistakes up to God. Give it all to Him and know that God forgives your faults through Jesus Christ and loves you dearly. If you haven't invited Christ into your life, just open your heart to Him now.

If you want to read more about how God forgives, here are a few scriptures to look up: John 8: 3-11; Luke 7: 44-50; John 18: 15-18, 25-27, 21:15-19; Luke 23: 39-43; Luke 23: 24-34.

Monday, July 15, 2019

Continuing down the “Roman Road.” **Read Romans 6:23.**

This is the scripture many of us don't like to think about. Death. Isn't that a little harsh? Stanley writes,

“Needing to make amends for or pay for a wrong deed is not a new concept. Every parent has required a child to “pay” for a sin in some way. Our prisons are full of men and women paying for their sins against society. When you are wronged or taken advantage of, it is natural to want to be paid back for what was done. Our legal system is overrun with cases involving parties who want to be paid back for the damages they incurred at the hands of another. Strange as it may seem, God requires payment for the offenses He has incurred at the hands of mortal men...Each of us is guilty of committing offenses against our creator. The Bible refers to these offenses as sin...”

We are given the opportunity to choose between sin or Jesus Christ. If we choose sin, we choose death. Death is simply separation from God...a life without God, without experiencing His love and purpose for your life each and every day and throughout eternity.

Just by God's very nature, that which is imperfect cannot be allowed in God's presence; otherwise, God wouldn't be perfect. Yet, God has provided us a way to come into His presence. God knew we could not make ourselves holy and perfect, righteous and just; therefore, God sacrificed His very own Son, Jesus, to atone, to take our punishment, to pay our

payment, for the sins we have committed. When we accept Jesus, we accept the gift that Jesus bought us by His blood and sacrifice. We are made clean and pure, not by what we have done, but by what Christ has done for us. We are able, through Christ, to come into the presence of God & have the relationship with our Creator we long for.

What choice have you made: death or Jesus? Take time to thank God for giving you the choice. Give thanks for God's gift of eternal life. If you have never invited Christ into your life, what are you waiting for? Open your heart to Him...take the first step...God will help you with the rest.

Tuesday, July 16, 2019

The next leg of our "Roman Road." **Read Romans 5:8.**

Yes, the penalty for our sin is death, separation from God, but God, in His loving-kindness would not allow that to happen. *"While we were still sinners."* The Life Application Bible says, *"These are amazing words. God sent Jesus Christ to die for us, not because we were good enough, but just because he loved us. Whenever you feel uncertain about God's love for you, remember that he loved you even before you turned to him."*

The church is full of people that feel uncertain about God's love for them; they feel unworthy. What we need to realize is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners. God loves us and, in His eyes, we are worth much. Max Lucado writes, in He Chose The Nails, *"It wasn't enough for Christ to prepare you a feast. It wasn't enough for Christ to reserve you a seat. It wasn't enough for him to cover the cost and provide the transportation to the banquet. He did something more. He let*

you wear his own clothes, so that you would be properly dressed. He did that...just for you. Jesus took our sins and then gave us His righteousness.” As it is written in Romans 13:14, *“...clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

“While we were still sinners,” Christ came and was willing to take our sins upon Himself. In return He gave us His righteousness, allowing us to have the choice of accepting the relationship God offers us, to come before Him. He then paid the price for our sin. Why? Because He could not bear the thought of an eternity without us.

Just spend time thanking God tonight in prayer for taking your sin and restoring you to a right relationship with God. Thank God that we don't have to get our lives all together before we can have a relationship with Him. *“While we were still sinners.”* God tells us to *“Come as we are...”* If you have not accepted this relationship, this restoration, this act of sacrifice by Christ on your behalf, I pray you will tonight. Just open your heart to Him. Talk to God.

Wednesday, July 17, 2019

For the fourth and last leg of what is called the “Roman Road,” **read Romans 10: 8-10.**

This road we've traveled has led us to acknowledge that we *“all fall short of God's glorious standard.”* We all sin. The penalty for sin, for turning away from God, is death. When we turn away from Him we separate ourselves from Him. Being imperfect as we are, we cannot come into God's perfect presence. But *“while we were still sinners”* Christ died for us

and took our imperfections, our sin, upon Himself, and replaced it with His perfect righteousness.

Romans 10: 8-10 tells us that salvation is in “easy reach.” All we have to do is accept the gift. *“For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”*

Lee Strobel describes his experience of coming to Christ, in his book The Case for Christ. He was an atheist and an investigative reporter who set up to disprove Christ and ended up becoming one of the worlds most published and outspoken Christians. He writes,

“Christianity is unique. It’s based on the “done” plan – Jesus has done for us on the cross what we cannot do for ourselves: he has paid the death penalty that we deserve for our rebellion and wrongdoing, so we can become reconciled to God. I didn’t have to struggle and strive to try to do the impossible of making myself worthy.

Over and over the Bible says that Jesus offers forgiveness and eternal life as a free gift that cannot be earned (see Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2: 8-9; Titus 3:5). It’s called grace – amazing grace, unmerited favor. It’s available to anyone who receives it in a sincere prayer of repentance. Even someone like me.

Yes, I had to take a step of faith, as we do in every decision we make in life. So, on November 8, 1981, I talked to God in a heartfelt and unedited prayer, admitting and turning from my wrongdoing,

and receiving the gift of forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus. I told him that with his help I wanted to follow him and his ways from here on out.

There were no lightning bolts, no audible replies, no tingly sensations...after taking that step, I knew from John 1:12 that I had crossed the threshold into a new experience. I had become something different: a child of God, forever adopted into his family through the historical, risen Jesus. Said the apostle Paul, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Sure enough, over time as I endeavored to follow Jesus' teachings, and open myself to his transforming power, my priorities, my values, and my character were (and continue to be) gradually changed. Increasingly I want Jesus' motives and perspectives to be my own. In fact, so radical was the difference in my life that a few months after I became a follower of Jesus, our five-year old daughter Alison went up to my wife and said, 'Mommy, I want God to do for me what he's done for Daddy.'"

Spend time tonight in prayer, looking back over the years and where God has brought you, where His priorities have become yours. Ask God to take you to the next level of your faith. And if you have not had that heartfelt talk with Jesus and invited Him into your life, let Him in now. Don't expect lightning bolts, but if your prayer is from the heart and you truly

want Him to be a part of your life, you will begin a wonderful journey.

Thursday, July 18, 2019

Read Colossians 3: 1-17.

As we begin our Christian journey, our relationship with Christ, we must begin to focus on heavenly things, clothing ourselves with “*mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience,*” and not the things of this world. One Life Application Bible note puts it this way,

“People should be able to see a difference between the way Christians and non-Christians live. Still, we should not expect instant maturity in new Christians. Christian growth is a lifelong process. Although we have a new nature, we don’t automatically think all good thoughts and have all pure attitudes when we become new people in Christ. But if we keep listening to God, we will be changing all the time. As you look over the last year, what changes for the better have you seen in your thoughts and attitudes? Change may be slow, but your life will change significantly if you trust God to change you.”

Are you allowing Christ to change you? Are you owning up to characteristics and habits in you that are ungodly? Are you allowing God to deal with those areas of your life by lifting them up to Him for help? When people interact with you at work, at meetings, in the store, in traffic, in your family, do they experience Christ? Pray for guidance that God may help you

see areas where He has grown you and areas where you still need to grow.

Friday, July 19, 2019

Pray for the people you know that may not know Jesus. Pray that God continues to move in your life and help you discern what God's purpose is for you. Just spend a half hour sitting with the Almighty.

Saturday, July 20, 2019

Read through Paul's letter to the Romans in one sitting. I am sure when the church in Rome received it, they wanted it read aloud in full, not in part. Hear Paul's heart in his letter. Imagine being a church member in Rome hearing Paul's words. Open your hearts to the truth about Christ voiced in Paul's letter. Again, hear what Christ has done for you!

And don't forget to invite someone to church tomorrow!!!

