

**YOU GOT MAIL: A Journey Through Paul's Letters
Transformed – Paul's Letter To The Church In Rome
Message for July 14, 2019
North East United Methodist Church**

Acts 2: 1-4 (NKJV) - *When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

PRAYER

Back in May, across the church, across the world, men and women celebrated the festival of Pentecost. For many it is a day equal to Christmas and Easter...At Christmas, we celebrate God's greatest gift, His Son...At Easter, we celebrate Christ's triumph over sin and death...



...and on Pentecost, we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit...it is this gift that gives us the faith to believe and trust in Christ as our Savior and to proclaim His message to the world through word and action.

It was on the day of Pentecost, that Peter, who had just a few days before denied Jesus, stood up and preached to thousands, ***“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”*** (Acts 2: 36, NKJV).

So why begin a series on Paul's letters talking about the Day of Pentecost?

Because in his letter to the Romans, after preaching and traveling for twenty years, Paul lays out God's plan of redemption, clear and concise...Because it is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that Paul is transformed on the road to Damascus from a persecutor of

Christians to, as he calls himself in **Romans 1:1 (NKJV)** – “*Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God...*” Because it is only through the Holy Spirit that men and women across the centuries have read Paul’s letter and the message of salvation and have believed...

The Holy Spirit is at work throughout our world, in this place, this morning...working through the Word of God, speaking and convicting hearts...

In the Gospel of John, John tells us, **John 1:1 (NKJV)** – “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” Later, in **John 1:14 (NKJV)**, we are told, “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*”

Jesus Christ is the Word of God...sent to us to speak to us of God’s love, of His plan for redemption, for salvation...

In **Romans 1:16 (NKJV)**, Paul writes, “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes...*” Paul is clear that the “gospel,” the Word of God, Jesus Christ, is where our salvation lies...

Peter explains, **I Peter 1:22-23 (NKJV)**, “*Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible through the word of God which lives and abides forever.*”

The Holy Spirit speaks and convicts hearts using God’s Word, through the name of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is here this morning, speaking once again through God’s Word, through the name of Jesus that you might hear the message of hope, love and salvation that God sent, that the prophets foretold, that Jesus lived, that Paul outlines for each of us in his letter to the church in Rome...

As Charles Spurgeon wrote, “***A sinner can no more repent and believe without the Holy Spirit's aid than he can create a world.***”

Jesus was clear to His disciples, before His death and resurrection, **John 16:7-8 (NKJV)**, “*Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper [the Holy Spirit] will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.*”

Jesus continues, **John 16:13 (NKJV)**, “*However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.*”

Pentecost...”the Spirit of truth, has come”

Martin Luther writes, in his Preface to the Book of Romans, *“But the Spirit is given only in, with, and through faith in Jesus Christ, as Paul says in his introduction. So, too, faith comes only through the word of God, the Gospel, that preaches Christ: how he is both Son of God and man, how he died and rose for our sake.”*

Hear the Gospel message...travel with me and Paul this morning, along the Roman Road...



...and through the Word of God may you believe and receive all God has for you...

1st Step on this Journey – **Romans 3:23 (NKJV)** – *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*

It all begins here – we all fall short – we say it all the time, “Nobody’s perfect” – perhaps not as bad as the next person – but what about in comparison to God – we are aware of our sin – we don’t want to reflect on it much – but we are aware – we screw up! - the older I get the more I realize my sin, my imperfections, my inclination like Paul to find myself confessing, **Romans 7:15 (NLT)**, *“I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate.”*

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.”*

So many do not come to church because they feel unworthy...Many sit in church and feel unworthy...Many come to church because they have been convicted that they are unworthy...that they fall short

Remember...the Holy Spirit “*will guide you into all truth*”...We are not worthy – no one is...Isaiah spoke this truth centuries before Christ was born, **Isaiah 64:6 (NLT)**, “*We are all infected and impure with sin. When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags.*”

2nd Step on the Journey – **Romans 6:23 (NKJV)** – “*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

We are given a choice.

We are given a choice – between sin or Jesus Christ – if we choose sin – we choose death – death is simply separation from God – a life without God – it happens every day – people turn away from God to alcohol, pornography, adultery, drugs, work – all things to get more out of life only to find that they lead to death, grief, guilt, addiction - It has been said that sin is first pleasing, then easy, then delightful, then frequent, and then habitual. The person then becomes obstinate, then resolved never to repent, and then he is ruined.

The Bible is clear that not everyone is a child of God...we like to think that is the truth...I would like to believe that God will save everyone...I want to believe it...that we will all be His children and all reside with Him in eternity one day...

We are given a choice.

John tells us, **John 1:12-13 (NLT)**, “*But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.*”

Paul tells us in Galatians 3:26 (NLT), “*For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.*” **Romans 8: 14-15 (NLT)**, “*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, ‘Abba, Father.’”*

Jesus, Himself, said, **John 8:42 (NLT)**, “*Jesus told them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, because I have come to you from God. I am not here on my own, but he sent me.’”*

3rd Step on the Journey – **Romans 5:8 (NKJV)**, “*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*”

Verses 9-10 continue, “*Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*”

But many ask, “How could a loving God not accept me?” – it has nothing to do with God’s love – it has to do with God’s nature – If God is perfect, that which is imperfect cannot come in –

Imagine two bottles of clear water – one God – one us –



Now put a little dash of mud in ours – a little bit of dirt...some pride, some selfishness, perhaps lust and greed...what about bitterness and gossip...we are no longer pure



If our lives, even one drop of our sinful nature, were to be joined with God suddenly God would no longer be perfect, pure –



Sin cannot be allowed to penetrate God's nature which is impossible – Revelation says of God, *“You alone are Holy”*...

God sheds tears when we choose to turn from Him – God wants nothing more than to spend a lifetime and eternity with us -

Romans 5:8 (NKJV), *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

These are amazing words...so many say, *“When I get my life together”*...“God couldn't love me, not after what I've done”... Yet, God says, *“Come as you are...warts and all...”*

While we were still sinners – trampled, rumped, beaten – Christ took our sins upon Himself – he extracted that bit of mud floating around within us and placed it upon Himself – then He washed it away with His blood – so we could come into eternity with God – **I John 1:7 (NLT)**, *“But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.”*

But we have to accept the gift...

Fourth Step on the Journey...on the Roman Road...**Romans 10: 8-10 (NKJV)**, *“But what does it say?...that ‘if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.’”*

Lee Strobel, investigative reporter for the Chicago Tribune, set out to disprove the resurrection, the core belief of Christianity...In the process he came to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ...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. 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”. 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.'"

Romans 10:13 (NKJV), "For 'whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'"

Paul finishes out his letter to the church in Rome, calling on believers, once they have recognized the gift God has given them, once the Holy Spirit has convicted them of all truth and the Word of God has led them into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, to begin living a life of faith, gratitude, and obedience.

Romans 12:1-2 (The Message), "So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you."

In the Lord of the Rings, Frodo Baggins remembers something his cousin told him... "It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out of your door," he used to say. "You step into the Road, and if you don't keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off to."

What road are you traveling? Where are your feet going? Where are you being swept off to?

Let the Holy Spirit convict you through God's Word of the truth...and "step into the Road" – a road that leads to life.