



October 2020

Roamin' through Romans (I)

Readings, Reflections, Prayers

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Monday, October 5: Romans 1:1-7

What is the Good News? How do we find Good News in our current situation?

For October and November, we're going to spend time reading the Book of Romans. We're moving forward a LONG time from the days of the Exodus. But Jewish people – including early Christians from a Jewish background (like Paul, who wrote Romans) – looked back to the Exodus as the defining moment in Israel's history. God saved His people from slavery. He gave them freedom. But the people continue to be ornery and disobedient. They sin again and again. Ultimately, God allows His people to be taken into exile by the Assyrians and Babylonians. He saves them again. Freedom again. And they sin again and again.

Ultimately, God will come Himself as the Messiah – the promised Messiah of the prophets – Jesus – to save His people. The Book of Romans describes how God has saved us once and for all, forever, through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Through Jesus we gain true freedom.

Paul is writing to followers of Jesus in Rome, as the Empire strikes back (the Roman Empire). The emperor is Nero. His mother, Agrippina, has just murdered Emperor Claudius. Shortly after Paul wrote Romans, Nero will murder his own mother, Rome will burn, Nero will build himself an extravagant pleasure palace, he will make Christians scapegoats for the fire, and he will brutally persecute believers (coincidentally, the fire just happened to burn the buildings where Nero wanted to build his new palace). Nero was a nasty man.

It is a religious age. Zealous Jews taught their followers God would only help them if they worked harder to keep the Law. Stoics taught you to deny yourself every pleasure and follow their teaching. Epicureans told you not to worry and just to enjoy life. Roman emperors insisted you worshipped them as gods.

Where is genuine good news? Paul says the good news has come in Jesus (1:1-5). The Greek word is "euangelion," literally meaning "good" ("eu-") "news" ("angelion"). We get our word "evangelism" from this word – telling the good news. It is sometimes translated into English as "gospel" from the Old English "god" (good) "spel" (news). The old English word "gospel" literally means "good news," too.

Unlike other religions, we believe **God** is the one who makes us right with Himself. We don't save ourselves by our own efforts. **God** does it all through Jesus by His life, death, and resurrection. We accept this gift of forgiveness and new life **by faith**. We don't earn it. Our good behaviour and deeds don't save us. We simply accept His mercy and grace. It's His gift to us. That is good news.

Who are we? We are people of good news. We are saved by God's grace. We are "called to belong to Jesus Christ ... loved by God and called to be his own holy people: (1:6-7). You are called to belong to God; you are loved by God; you are His holy child. How do those truths help you think about life more richly?

What do we do? We live and share good news. What does the good news of Jesus mean in your life, today? How can we **be** and **share** His good news?

*Out of this muddle, I cry to you,
God who has ordered the universe,
in whose hand the cosmos is secure.
Guide me to make a right beginning,
to do those things that are most needful,
and to know when to stop and rest.
Grant me humor and a light spirit in the face of what seems overwhelming.
Make my hands steady at their work, my heart steady at its prayer,
and let me, in all things, navigate by love, for Your love's sake.
Amen*

Tuesday, October 6: Romans 1:8-13

I have "encouragement files." When I get an encouraging note in the mail or a "Thank You" card it goes into a physical file folder. When I get an encouraging email, it goes into a computer file labelled "encouragement." Then, when I get a discouraging note or a critical email, or when I feel like giving up, I go to my encouragement files to remind myself it's not all in vain. Somebody appreciates what we do.

Paul wants the Christians in Rome to know that he is encouraged by them and their faith.

Being a Christian anywhere in Paul's world, but especially in Rome, was not easy. People were expected to declare "Caesar is Lord." Jews and Christians would not say this – only God (or Jesus, for Christians) is Lord. This meant abuse and persecution from both officials and ordinary neighbours. Christians were considered disloyal Romans. In Rome itself, in the shadow of Nero's palace and temples to Julius Caesar, Augustus Caesar, and other emperors, naming Jesus as "lord" – not Caesar – was tantamount to treason.

During the reign of Emperor Claudius, 8 or so years before this letter, when the Good News first arrived in Rome, many Jews became Christians. This caused such an uproar in the Jewish community that Claudius banished ALL Jews – including Jewish Christians from Rome. However, the non-Jewish Christians – Gentiles – remained. When Nero took over, some Jews, including Jewish Christians, drifted back to the city. But the heart of the Romans church was no longer Jewish background people, but non-Jews (Gentiles).

Paul is so encouraged the church is surviving these tumultuous times. He wants to encourage them, too.

We all need encouragement. We can all be encouragers as well.

- We can write notes or emails – or find other ways (phone calls, texts) – to encourage one another (not necessarily a 16-chapter long letter, like Romans)
- We can pray for one another (1:10).
- We can "visit" with one another (1:11-12), even if it is only over the phone, Skype, or Zoom.
- We can "come alongside" one another (1:13), even if it is only in spirit. Paul has not, to this point, been able to visit the Roman Christians in person.

Who can you encourage today? How will you do that?

*Grant me, O Lord, to know what I ought to know, to love what I ought to love,
to praise what delights You most, to value what is precious in your sight,
to hate what is offensive to You.*

*Do not suffer me to judge according to the sight of my eyes,
nor to pass sentence according to the hearing of the ears of ignorant men;
but to discern with a true judgment between things visible and spiritual,
and above all, always to inquire what is the good pleasure of Your will.*

Amen.

Thomas À Kempis

Wednesday, October 7: Romans 1:14-17

We often see the world in overly simplistic terms. We talk of "Canadians" (and by that, some of us mean white, European-background immigrants), and "non-Canadians" (by which we mean non-white, non-European background people – some of whom have longer pedigrees in Canada than we do – including First Nations peoples). We need to rethink our categories. And appreciate that being Canadian means being part of a rich cultural mosaic that reflects many different expressions of "Canadian-ness."

In Paul's day, people had similar, binary views of the world. Some people divided the world into "Greeks" (civilized people) and non-Greeks (uncivilized barbarians, including the Jews and Romans). Jewish people

saw the world in terms of Jews (God's chosen people) and Gentiles (non-Jews, God's not-chosen people).

The Good News of Jesus breaks down those stereotypes. Paul emphasizes the church absolutely wipes out those old barriers. God's good news is for ALL people (*"For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ... There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:26-28)).

The early church came to include all sorts of people. That was a threat to the stratified social order in cities like Rome. The Romans wanted everyone to know their place, ethnic group, and religion, and to stay there. The church, a social diverse community, was perceived by the Romans as a real threat to social stability.

In Paul's world, choosing to follow Jesus had real consequences. It did mean being part of a multi-ethnic community. It also meant declaring "Jesus is Lord," making you disloyal, even a traitor. This was especially true in Rome, dominated by a man who claimed to be the only true lord of all the world, Caesar. To say, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel"* (1:16) is a profoundly political as well as strong religious statement. The consequences could be catastrophic (and would be, as Nero became more and more paranoid and unstable).

Why is Paul so unashamed of the gospel? Because it is the *"power of God"* – this is not just human wisdom. This is God's truth. And His power, His Spirit, is in us and with us as we live out our faith, faithfully.

The good news brings *"salvation"* to ALL who believe – regardless of ethnic identity. Salvation does mean eternal life with God, but it means much more than this. It also means rescuing people from sin – now – and rescuing people from trouble – now. Justice – now. Meaning and purpose to life – now.

The good news reveals God's righteousness/justice/makes us right with God (1:17). Ever since the Fall, God has been restoring people to right standing with Himself, forgiving their sin, and giving them new beginnings. This covenant of blessing is made explicit to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) and comes to completion through Jesus' death and resurrection. Through Jesus, God is restoring justice/righteousness to His world. He is forgiving and restoring individual people to relationship with Himself.

We are part of a global, multicultural family of people who love Jesus ([50 Countries Sing Amazing Grace](#)). Praise God. Pray for those in countries where believers are persecuted (did you notice the faces of two singers in Amazing Grace are blanked out?). Pray that we would know the good news as the power of God for salvation in our lives, now and forever.

*Oh God, I ask not for easier tasks.
I ask for stronger aptitudes and greater talents
to meet any tasks which may come my way.
Help me to help others so that their lives may be made easier and happier.
Strengthen my confidence in my fellow men in spite of what they may do or say.
Give me strength to live according to the Golden Rule,
enthusiasm to inspire those around me,
sympathy to help lighten the burdens of those who suffer,
and a spirit of joy and gladness to share with others.
Amen*

Thursday, October 8: Romans 1:18-32

Romans 1:18-32 is depressing reading. It's like Paul is reading the October 8 BBC, CNN, Fox, CTV, and CBC news all at once. We can get hung up on specific examples of sinful behaviour. The primary problem, however, is not "sin" but "godlessness" or "ungodliness" (1:18). The issue is not primarily one of behaviour (though that follows), but of **worship**. If you don't worship God – if you worship anything other than God – then your life will be out of whack. You will miss the truth. You will sin. The symptoms of spiritual illness associated with misdirected worship include evils like those listed here.

"Sin" is not just doing wrong things. Sin is a symptom of something much deeper and more primal. People were created to worship **God**. When we do that, we fulfil our destiny. *"Worship was and is a matter of gazing with delight, gratitude, and love at the creator God and expressing his praise in wise, articulate speech. Those who do this are formed by this activity to become the generous, humble stewards through whom God's creative and sustaining love is let loose in the world,"* writes biblical scholar, Tom Wright.¹

"That is how things were meant to be," Wright continues, noting we all fail in this grand vocation. *"When humans turn from worshipping the one God to worshipping anything else instead, the problem is not just that they 'do wrong things,' distorting their human minds, bodies, hearts and everything else ... The word for 'sin' in the New Testament means not just 'doing wrong things,' but 'missing the target.' The target is a wise, full human life of worship and stewardship. Idolatry and sin are a failure of responsibility. They are a way of declining the divine summons to reflect God's image. They constitute an insult, an affront, to the loving, wise Creator himself. The Great Playwright has composed a drama and written a wonderful part especially for us to play; and, like a spoiled and silly child, we have torn up the script and smirked our way through a self-serving but ultimately self-destructive plot of our own"* (pp. 100-101).

When we fail to worship God and make Him the Lord of our lives, we give non-divine forces a power and authority they were never meant to have. We see people doing this all the time: obvious examples are gods of money, sex, power, and nation. Like fire, these "forces" are good servants but horrible masters. In the ancient world, these powers were worshiped as gods and goddesses in pagan cultures. They function as de facto gods and goddesses in our world, too. For example, some people get more incensed about how others do or don't worship a national idol (an anthem/flag/person) than how they do or don't worship God.

The Book of Romans shows us the cross of Jesus – and only the cross of Jesus – can take us from where we are to rediscover our true identity as people who worship God and God alone. Jesus' death is not simply about managing our bad behaviour and forgiving our sinful acts. The cross triumphantly defeats the deep spiritual forces leading us away from God. The cross allows us to rediscover our identity as God's children.

Our fundamental, primary vocation is to worship God, to bear His image, to reflect His wise stewardship into the world, to be a blessing to all people and to all of God's creation. Romans 1:18-32 shows us how hideous it is when we lose sight of that goal. We see this truth writ large in the news headlines every day. But remember we are people of good news. In light of what we have thought about today, how can we know God's good news (review 1:1-5, 16-17)? How can we be good news?

*Give us, O Lord,
steadfast hearts, which no unworthy thought can drag downwards;
unconquered hearts, which no tribulation can wear out,
upright hearts, which no unworthy purpose may tempt aside.
Bestow upon us also, O Lord our God, understanding to know You,
diligence to seek You,
wisdom to find You,
and a faithfulness that may finally embrace You.
Amen.*

Friday, October 9: Romans 2:1-11

Some parts of the Bible are smooth sailing. We love Psalm 23 (*"The Lord is my shepherd ..."*) and John 3:16 (*For God so loved the world ...*). The book of Romans is tough. We have to think – hard. Part of the challenge is we read isolated verses here and there without really trying to wrestle with the BIG PICTURE of what Paul is saying. When we cherry pick specific verses, however, other parts don't make a lot of sense. We're not sure, for instance, what to do with passages like Romans 2.

¹ N.T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Rethinking the Meaning of Jesus' Crucifixion*, p. 100.

The typical message we hear from Romans is God told Adam and Eve to keep a moral code; they didn't and the punishment was death. God then told Israel to keep a moral code (the Law); they blew it and were condemned to exile and death. We don't keep the moral code either. However, Jesus obeyed the moral law perfectly and in his death paid the penalty on behalf of the rest of us. Jesus kept all the rules. By believing in Jesus and His work for us, we go to heaven. If we don't believe we don't go to heaven.

Is being a Christian all about keeping a moral code? Has God established a set of rules and regulations we have to keep? But, try as we might, we cannot attain? Because we cannot keep unkeepable rules, are we condemned? Is the good news simply that Jesus kept all the rules and because of His superhuman rule-keeping, we are now ok? That's often how we present "the good news" or "the gospel."

The real message of the entire Bible (including Romans) is ***we are created for a vocation***: to worship God, bear His image, be His wise and caring stewards, and be a blessing to all His creation. As Peter puts it, "*you are a chosen people; you are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light*" (1 Peter 2:9). This is a lot more than just having your sins forgiven and going to heaven when you die.

Through the good news we are literally reborn – now – into our genuine humanity. Yes, our sin is forgiven. But more importantly the evil forces underlying those sins are defeated. We are rescued. We are reunited with our Creator. We are refocussed on God as the centre of our worship. We rediscover our vocation to love and care for God's people (which is ALL people) and for His creation, which He declares good.

The key question is, "Who do we worship?" Specific sins reflect misplaced worship: nation, sex, money, power, self. When we say, "I can do what I want; I know better than God," we have a worship problem. One such problem is we see other people's shortcomings so clearly and are blind to our own failures. It's very easy to see others' faults. It's much harder to see our own. We love to judge others.

Paul is encouraging to be honest with ourselves: Do I love God with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength? Do I live like it? Do I love my neighbour as myself (or do I judge my neighbour instead)?

Paul is encouraging us to be humble. Yes, we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. Let's admit it. Do I confess it. Do I ask for forgiveness? Then, and only then, can the Spirit change my heart.

*O Holy Spirit of God, abide with us;
inspire all our thoughts;
pervade our imaginations; suggest all our decisions;
order all our doings.
Be with us in our silence and in our speech,
in our haste and in our leisure,
in company and in solitude,
in the freshness of the morning
and in the weariness of the evening;
and give us grace at all times humbly to rejoice in Your companionship.
Amen*

Saturday, October 10: Romans 2:12-16

Did you know that in Halifax, Nova Scotia, taxi drivers are not allowed to wear T-shirts? In Fredericton, New Brunswick, it is against the law to wear a snake, or carry a pet lizard, in public. Province-wide in Alberta it is against the law to paint a wooden ladder AND, province-wide in Alberta it is illegal to own a pet rat (FYI Alberta is the only region in the entire world free of Norwegian rats). Canada-wide, it is illegal to challenge someone to a duel and/or accept an invitation to a duel. Nation-wide, it is also illegal to waterski after sunset. And, nation-wide it is illegal to scare the Queen: "*Everyone who willfully does an act with intent to*

alarm Her Majesty" is guilty of a crime according to the Criminal Code Of Canada. Who knew?

Paul is writing Romans for two different groups of Christians in Rome. Some were Jewish-background believers. They knew all about "the Law" – the Old Testament Torah – found in the first five books of the Bible. We read many of these laws, including the Ten Commandments, when we read Exodus. Many Jewish people, proud inheritors of the Law, believed that since they knew the Law inside out, they were good with God. However, Paul wants to remind us all that simply knowing the Law is not enough. The BIG question is, do we OBEY the Law? Do we actually live it out in our lives? Or do we constantly break its precepts?

The other group of Christians in Rome were Gentile (non-Jewish) background believers. They did not have lifetimes of studying the Law as Jewish background people did. Many of the Jewish Christians wanted the Gentile believers to become Jews first – learn all the Laws, be circumcised, etc., etc. – before they could follow Jesus. Paul, however, emphasizes that that the old law-defined religion is dead. It was put to death when Jesus died on the cross. We are saved by faith in Jesus, not faithfulness in keeping the Law.

Paul emphasizes that the Spirit actually writes God's laws on our hearts and consciences: we often KNOW what is right and good in our souls. We are responsible for faithfully obeying the godly guidance we receive by the Spirit. But we don't need to worry about every little law in the Torah. Those days are done.

In the days of the prophet Micah, people claimed to right with God because they knew all the Laws and kept the letter of the Law (sort of). But they did it all with a bad attitude. They grudgingly did the least possible to more-or-less follow the bare minimum of what the Law required. Micah blasts them: "*The Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God*" (Micah 6:8). It's about loving, obedient hearts, not legalistic actions.

God says to us:

- *do what is right* – what does that mean for me, today?
- *love mercy* – what does that mean for me, today?
- *walk humbly with your God* – what does that mean for me, today?

*God, help us
to be generous in our opinions of others,
to be considerate of all we meet,
to be patient with those with whom we work,
to be faithful to every trust,
to be courageous in the face of danger,
to be humble in all our living,
to be prayerful every hour of the day,
to be joyous in all life's experience,
and to be dependent upon You
for strength in facing life's uncertainties.
Amen*

Thanksgiving Sunday, October 11: Romans 2:17-29

The hand bag looks like a Gucci. It's a Gucci pattern. It has a Gucci logo. But it sells in the streets of Rome for €10-20. It's not a Gucci! When you look closely, precision workmanship is not there. The materials are tacky plastic/nylon, not leather. It's a cheap knock off, made to look like the real thing.

One of Paul's themes in Romans is that outward appearances can be deceiving. Jewish people – including Jewish Christians – were proud of their Jewish heritage and identity. They were proud possessors of the Law. They tried to be faithful followers of the letter of the Law. Physically, the men bore the mark of the Law – circumcision – on their bodies. Outwardly they looked like God's faithful people.

Paul, however, has been highlighting that outward appearances can be deceiving. When you look closely, and you ask, does this person love God with their heart, soul, mind, and strength, what would you say? Do they love their neighbour as themselves? These are the great commandments (Mark 12:28-31).

We are saved by genuine faith in Jesus, not superficially keeping the Torah Law. The biggest issue is not how faithfully we keep all the picayune Old Testament laws, but do we, or do we not, actually love God first and foremost? Do we, or do we not, actually love our neighbour? Is our faith genuine?

In these early chapters, Paul is addressing those deep underlying spiritual issues. Notice what the Jewish people's vocation was supposed to be: they were supposed to be a guide for the blind, be a light for people lost in darkness, instruct the ignorant, and teach children the ways of God (2:19-20). The Jewish people knew that. So, metaphorically, they put up statues of the Ten Commandments outside the courthouse. But they didn't live them out. They broke them all, one by one (2:21-23). When non-Jews (Gentiles) heard what the Jews said, and then looked at how they lived, they saw hypocrisy (2:24). Rather than attracting other people to their loving God, the Jews' sin was driving non-believers away. Does that happen today?

Paul's goes on to say being a Jew is not a matter of knowing and legalistically keeping the letter of the Law anyway. It's not a matter of doing the right things and not doing the wrong things. It's a matter of the heart. It's a matter of worship. It's a matter of being truly connected with God through His Spirit.

How can we apply this to our circumstances? We are called to be a light to people, to help them find Jesus. How are we doing at that? What do our social media posts reveal? What does our conversation actually say about our commitment to sharing God's good news with the world?

- Some Christian I know seem more caught up in a political battle over their perceived "right" not to wear a face mask than they are concerned about other people's health.
- Some Christians spend far more energy as evangelists for their preferred (American!) political agenda than about the greatest hope of all – new life in and through Jesus.
- Some Christians might be able to recite the fruit of Spirit, but their lives reveal anything but love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

When non-Christians hear what we say, and then look at how we live, do they see hypocrisy? Rather than attracting other people to their loving God, are our words and actions driving non-believers away?

Thanksgiving is a time to give thanks for the truth that we are saved by God's grace, Jesus' sacrifice, and His love. We are not saved by outward appearances or because we wear the right "label."

Do we genuinely love God with all our heart, mind soul, and strength? Do we genuinely love our neighbour? Do we really want to be a guide for the blind, be a light for people lost in darkness, instruct the ignorant, and teach children the ways of God? Do we do that?

*Lord, your harvest is the harvest of love;
Love sown in the hearts of people,
Love that spreads out like the branches of a great tree covering all who seek its shelter;
Love that inspires and recreates;
Love that is planted in the weak and the weary, the sick and the dying.
The harvest of your love is the life that reaches through the weeds of sin and death
to the sunlight of resurrection.
Lord, nurture my days with your love,
water my soul with the dew of forgiveness,
That the harvest of my life might be your joy.
Amen.*

Frank Topping

Thanksgiving Monday, October 12: Romans 3:1-8

Marianne and I were watching a *Murdoch Mysteries* episode in which a boxer is the favourite to win his bout. But he is being well paid to throw the fight. In other words, he is being paid to lose. The reason for this is that some unscrupulous sort has wagered a lot of cash on the outcome of the match, backing the underdog, who he knows will win, against all odds. The problem is, the first boxer then decides he will NOT throw the fight. He chooses to do his best. And handily beats his weaker opponent. The boxer is entrusted to accomplish a specific task. He chooses not to. Needless to say, the unscrupulous man is not happy.

The Jewish people were entrusted to accomplish a specific task. They were blessed with the Good News of God's love, to share with all nations. Since the days of Abraham (back in Genesis 12), they were blessed to be blessing. They were called to a light to the Gentiles, instructing them in God's ways, God's love, and God's grace. But they chose to see God's love as a treasure to hoarded to themselves. They didn't share it. They had a specific task; they failed to accomplish it.

Paul is agreeing that yes, indeed, the Jewish people have the truth about God. They have Good News to share. But he is also reminding them that they haven't been living up to their calling. Paul is challenging them to live up to their identity as Good News sharers. He is confronting attitudes among Jewish people, in general, and Jewish Christian believers, in particular, who are saying how they live and what they say don't really matter. They say,

- *"Our sinfulness serves a good purpose, for it helps people see how righteous God is. Isn't it unfair, then, for him to punish us?"* (3:5). When people contrast how holy God is compared to me, doesn't my sinfulness just reflect really well on God?
- *"How can God condemn me as a sinner if my dishonesty highlights his truthfulness and brings him more glory?"* Surely, the fact that I sin highlights how perfect God is. He looks so wonderful in comparison with me, that I'm doing him a favour by being rotten, to highlight his perfection.
- *"The more we sin, the better it is!"* The more I sin, the better God looks. So, maybe I ought to sin even more, so God looks even better?

Does that seem messed up to you? And yet, sometimes, do we rationalize our behaviour in similar ways?

We have been entrusted with the Good News of God's love. Am I living it out, as well as I can, in my life? Am I sharing it, as well as I can, through my words? Thanksgiving, a time when we give thanks for God's blessings to us, is a great time to reflect on how God has blessed us. And to think about how we can be a blessing to others.

*Creator God, bring to fruition the work of your Kingdom.
Make us part of that joyful harvest in which your loving purpose is completed.
Help us to realize how important the smallest words and deeds are in the context of eternity.
At harvest time, when we remember your goodness,
Makes us grateful also for all we have received from the labour of others
Who have sown the seeds of faith, hope, and love in our lives.
Let us not keep these gifts to ourselves,
But cast them abroad that others may know and love you.
We give you thanks, O Lord.
Amen.*

Unknown

Tuesday, October 13: Romans 3:9-20

I get tired of reading the news. The news always seems to be BAD news. Is anything good going on, anywhere in the world?

Paul begins Romans with the bad news: he quotes the Old Testament prophets who emphasize that, "No

one is righteous – not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one.” Ouch.

Paul’s purpose, of course, is to give us the bad news first: each one of us needs a Saviour. Then he can give us the good news: we have new life in and through Jesus.

One of the BIG failings of the Jewish nation, called out by the prophets, is that they had become inward looking. Instead of appreciating that they had been *“blessed to be a blessing to all nations”* (Genesis 12:1-3, Romans 2:17-20), they chose to see themselves as blessed for themselves and themselves alone. Rather than share God’s love with the nations, they kept it to themselves. They failed at their calling (2:21-3:4).

This causes a crisis: how is God to be faithful to His covenant to rescue and bless the entire world if His chosen messengers, the people of Israel, won’t share His love with others but are evil (3:5)? Israel was not being good news, because the people chose to worship and follow the gods of greed, lust, power, violence, and nation (read any of the five Old Testament passages Paul quotes in 3:10-18).

This raises some challenges for us in 2020. These days, God’s people – the church/we – are called to be God’s good news to all nations, too. How are we doing at that? Through what we do, say, or post on social media, are we bringing light, hope, and good news – Jesus? Or are we sharing judgment, anger, and politics? Are we inviting people to Jesus and the Kingdom of God? Or to something else?

As we continue in 3:21-31 tomorrow, we will see that we are “justified” or “made righteous” (the Greek word can be translated either way) by faith in Jesus. On one hand, this means all of us who believe – regardless of ethnicity or nationality – are now members of God’s family (see Romans 2:29, Galatians 3:26-29). On the other hand, it also means we are all declared “righteous” or “just” through Jesus. We don’t have to fear the judgment described in 3:19-20. God loves us and saves us. And He does give us the vocation to be His people, reflect His image, and be a blessing. We are to be Good News.

- You are God beloved child. What does that mean to you?
- You are declared to be “in the right” through faith in Jesus. What does that mean to you?
- You are called to be God’s good news to the world. What does that mean to you?

*O, You who are the Way, the Truth, and the Life, I lift my heart to You.
Guide me in the Way this day, enlighten me with the Truth,
and grant me the more abundant Life which You alone can give.
This I ask, not that I may selfishly get good or glory for myself,
but that I may do good to others and so glorify Your name.
Amen.*

Wednesday, October 14: Romans 3:21-26

We watch a lot of murder mysteries (don’t ask!). Typically what happens is that the detectives or lawyers spend most of the show chasing down leads that end up being dead ends. But in the final scene, some dramatic new piece of evidence is revealed that suddenly makes everything come clear. An innocent person, who is about to be hanged for a murder they didn’t commit, is exonerated. And the guilty person, who thought they had gotten away with the heinous crime, is caught.

Up to this point in Romans, we may feel a bit like we’ve been in a court room. Charges have been laid against us: *“No one is righteous – not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one ... Everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.”* The case is not looking good for us. The charges against us are serious. And they are totally true.

“But” Paul interjects (3:21). The word “but” means a change is about to happen. A big “reveal” is about to

take place. The situation in the court room is about to be dramatically altered. *"But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are ... God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood."*

We are set free from the penalty of our sins – which we totally deserve – thanks to the death of Jesus on the cross.

Notice, God is not saying *It's all OK. So you messed up a bit. I'll just pretend it didn't happen.* No. Sin is still serious business. There is still punishment. But **Jesus** takes the punishment we deserve. Our sin has consequences, but instead of us paying the price, **Jesus** takes our punishment on Himself. Paul describes us as being "freed" from our sins – the technical term, "redemption," is like the slaves from Egypt being "freed" into liberty. We are free from the penalty of our sin. Remember, though, Jesus pays the price.

More than that, Paul declares God "makes us right in His sight" – we are not just let off, we are given the status of being made pure and holy. We can have a free and open relationship with God again. We have the privilege of knowing God, completely and without barrier. All thanks to the sacrifice of Jesus.

Isn't that great news?

So, our challenge, then, as God's chosen people, is to be His ambassadors of this good news. Let's not waste our time getting embroiled in American politics with the election approaching south of the border. Let's share the REAL good news: new life in and through Jesus!

*I pause for a moment and reflect on God's life-giving presence in every part of my body,
in everything around me, in the whole of my life.
I need to close out the noise, to rise above the noise:
the noise that interrupts, that separates, the noise that isolates.
I need to listen to God again.
In God's loving presence I unwind the past day,
starting from now and looking back, moment by moment.
I gather in all the goodness and light, in gratitude.
I attend to the shadows and what they say to me,
seeking healing, courage, forgiveness.
What is stirring in me as I pray?
Am I consoled, troubled, left cold?
I imagine Jesus himself standing or sitting at my side,
and share my feelings with him.
Thank you, God, that I have been able to spend a few moments alone with You.
Thank You for what I have learned and how I have grown.
Amen.*

Thursday, October 15: Romans 3:27-31

Situated on a dramatic clifftop in northern England, the ruins of Dunstanburgh Castle dominate the landscape for miles around. Eight hundred years after it was built, it's still a huge castle, impressive even in ruin. Dunstanburgh Castle was built by Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, with one purpose: to declare his wealth and power to anyone and everyone. It has been 800 years, and the castle still keeps Thomas' name alive. But in the most important sense he failed. The sign in front of the castle describes Thomas to visitors as an "arrogant and unpopular" man. Rich, powerful – and arrogant and unpopular. Ouch. What are the things we want to be remembered for? Hopefully NOT that we were arrogant and unpopular.

What did the Christians in Rome want to be remembered for? Throughout Rome, there was a network of fairly autonomous house churches – small groups of believers. Some were mostly composed of Jewish background believers; they had little to do with non-Jewish people. Some were made up of Gentile background believers; they had little to do with Jewish background people. One of Paul's big concerns is that all believers – Jewish and non-Jewish – appreciate that Jesus is Saviour of ALL people, not just their own kind of people. He wants them to be remembered as an integrated, multi-racial, multi-ethnic community in which what unites them – Jesus – far outweighs their ethnic differences.

The early Christian church was unique in the ancient world. Every other occupation and organization was socially stratified or ethnically defined. Slaves, for instance, related to slaves, but never to free people or Roman citizens. Jews lived and worked with fellow Jews, but would not work with Gentiles. Men would socialize with other men, but never with women. However this new creation – God's creation – the church, is to be a place where slaves and masters, Jews and non-Jews, women and men, young and old all came together in one amazing diverse community. Nothing else in the ancient world was anything even remotely like the Christian church. An amazing faith and amazing community is what they are remembered for.

These days, the church is called to be just as diverse: *"There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:28). The church is still called to be a radical, counter-cultural community in which ethnicity, ability, age, gender, and income simply don't matter. How are we doing with that? Amazing faith and amazing community: is that what we will be remembered for?

Paul wants us to know that the good news of Jesus is for all of us – no matter what our background is. And, the good news is for us to share with EVERYONE! No one is beyond God's love and mercy. May we be remembered as those who loved God with all our being, and as those who loved their neighbour.

What is God saying to me?

*Lord, what I'm trying to do is set aside time to focus on my life - both temporal and spiritual.
Jesus, I try to imagine that You are sitting here beside me,
and I talk over with You what has been going on for me.
Jesus, I attempt to understand that in a myriad of ways
You enter the everyday circumstances of my existence.
But life is fast and full.
Often, pressures and commitments drown out the little voice at my core. I know that.
I want to do something about it.
Knowing that You love me unconditionally, I can afford to be honest about how I am.
How has the last day been, and how do I feel now?
Thank You, Lord, that I can share my feelings openly with You.
How do I find myself today? Where am I with God? With others?
Do I have something to be grateful for? Then I give thanks.
Is there something I am sorry for? Then I ask forgiveness.
I try to become still and receptive to what Your Holy Spirit might want to impart to me.
Thank You for these few moments spent alone with You and for the insights I have been given.
Amen.*

Friday, October 16: Romans 4:1-8

When I was in Grades 2-through 10, we lived in Tsawwassen, south of Vancouver. My parents both worked in Vancouver, leaving early in the morning and returning about 6 for supper. Before school and after school, my brother and I were cared for by the Hobsons, a family with two kids of their own. Derek, their son, was about my age. We spent a lot of time together. We had fun together. We got into trouble together. In many ways I was like a third Hobson kid. And yet, I was not really a Hobson. When I got sick, it was my Mom who cared for me, not Mrs. Hobson. When vacations came, we spend them with our family, not the

Hobsons. At the end of the day, my "Hobson-ness" was just a business relationship.

Paul is now talking about the relationship of various groups within the church. Are Jewish-background Christians and non-Jewish (Gentile)-background Christians equal in the family of God? Or is one "better" than the other? Apparently, there was some tension about this in Rome. These days, we might ask, are there first- and second-class Christians? Are some denominations or traditions (Baptist? Charismatic? Catholic?) more "Christian" than others? Are some of us "right" and others "wrong"?

To deal with this tension, Paul talks about Abraham. When we first meet Abraham in Genesis 12, there is no indication he knows anything at all about God. Yet God reveals Himself to Abraham, Abraham believes, and Abraham follows God. In Genesis 15, God establishes a covenant – a solemn, legal agreement – with Abraham. *"Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great ... you will have a son of your own who will be your heir ... Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That's how many descendants you will have!"* (Genesis 15:1-5).

In response, *"Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith"* (Genesis 15:6, quoted in Romans 4:3).

Abraham did not become "righteous" – did not enter into God's covenant – by following the Old Testament Law; the Law didn't exist yet. He was declared righteous – in right relationship with God – through faith.

Paul's point is that we are all saved by **faith** in God, not by how faithfully we do or do not follow the Law or what church we attend. Any of us who put our faith in God is a FULL member of the covenant community of God's people. Through faith we are declared FULL members of the family of God. No if's, and's, or but's.

This is NOT to say that we are free to go wild and do anything and everything. It is to emphasize that our salvation is God's gracious gift to us, not something we earn. In response, our thank offering back to God are hearts, wills, and lives that seek to honour Him, by faithfully living His principles.

John writes, *"To all who believed him (Jesus) 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"* (John 1:12-13). You are God's son or daughter. You are a FULL member of the family of God. How does that make you feel?

In response, how then should we live?

*I slow myself down for a moment and try to realize that God is present.
To me. Here and now.
He is in present in what I do, in the people that I meet,
and the situations I find myself in daily.
How can I make this reality real for myself?
God, please help me to be free from my own preoccupations,
to be open to You in this time of prayer, to come to love and serve You more.
I ask how I am within myself today?
Am I particularly tired, stressed, or off-form?
If any of these characteristics apply, can I try to let go of the concerns that disturb me?
I take my time to read the Word of God, slowly, a few times,
allowing myself to dwell on anything that strikes me.
Do I notice myself reacting as I pray with the Word of God?
Do I feel challenged, comforted, angry?
Imagining Jesus sitting or standing by me,
I speak out my feelings, as one trusted friend to another.
I thank God for these few moments spent alone with him
and for any insights I may have been given concerning the text. Amen.*

Saturday, October 17: Romans 4:9-17

Romans is a challenging letter because it so Jewish. For a letter written to the churches in Rome, in Italy, it is surprising how much Paul deals with Jewish themes. The challenge appears to be that there were some house churches in Rome where Jewish background people were the majority; they wanted all Christians to follow all the Old Testament Law, including men being circumcised. Other house churches seemed to be mostly non-Jewish (Gentile) background believers who wanted to forget totally the Jewish roots of Christianity and move on, ignoring all the Old Testament.

Paul wants us all to know that – Jewish or non-Jewish – if we put our faith in Jesus, we are declared righteous, part of God’s covenant community, sons and daughters of God, fully part of His family; we are saved. In contrast, if we do not put our faith in Jesus – whether we are Jewish or non-Jewish – we are not part of God’s covenant community and all that goes with it.

For Jewish people, in Paul’s day, this was inconceivable. They surely were – and always would be – “children of Abraham;” it was literally in their DNA. But Paul is reframing God’s covenant. God’s covenant is not an “I’m ethnically-Jewish-and-follow-the-Law-and-therefore-saved” thing, but an “I-put-my faith-in-Jesus” thing. After all, Abraham was declared righteous and the founder of the covenant community, long before the Law ever existed (not written down until the days of Moses).

The good news for us is that our God gives those who are spiritually dead – who do not know or believe in Jesus yet – new life (4:17). Some of us who come from backgrounds where we didn’t know Jesus can identify with a sense of spiritual “deadness,” when life seemed empty, bleak, pointless, and hopeless. Jesus gave us life: purpose, hope, joy, passion, love, peace, and a future – LIFE! This life comes by faith, not through following all sorts of rules and regulations.

The challenge for some of us, however, is that we are not saved just because we’ve grown up in a Christian family, go to church, and follow the rules. Being “good” doesn’t save us. Our Christian heritage doesn’t save us. Our DNA doesn’t matter. We actually need to put our faith, authentically, in God.

Thank God that His kingdom, His family, His covenant, His righteousness is available to ALL who put their faith in Him. That is great news. Have you genuinely put your faith in Him? Great.

Pray for those you know who need the peace, joy, love, and hope that only Jesus can give ...

*I remind myself that, as I sit here now,
God is gazing on me with love and holding me in His hands.
I pause for a moment and think of this.
"In these days, God taught me as a schoolteacher teaches a pupil" (St Ignatius).
I remind myself that there are things God has to teach me yet,
and ask for the grace to hear them and let them change me.
I remind myself that I am in the presence of the Lord.
I will take refuge in His loving heart.
He is my strength in times of weakness.
He is my comforter in times of sorrow.
In this expectant state of mind, I turn to the text for the day with confidence.
I believe that the Holy Spirit is present and may reveal whatever the passage has to say to me.
Lord, help me read reflectively, listening with the 'ear of my heart' to what is going on in my heart.
Jesus you speak to me through the words of the Scriptures.
May I respond to Your call today.
Teach me to recognize Your hand at work in my daily living.
I thank God for these few moments spent alone with him
and for any insights I may have been given concerning the text.
Amen.*

Sunday, October 18: Romans 4:18-25

Every second morning I run around Henderson Lake about 6 a.m. Well, my goal is run around Henderson Lake every other morning at 6 a.m. In fact, some mornings I just cannot drag myself out of bed. The occasional morning my knee or ankle is too sore so I choose to rest. And some mornings I set out ... but my body is just not happy. It's hard to keep going. It's a real struggle.

Paul celebrates that Abraham kept the faith. He kept on believing in and following God even when the going got tough. If you remember our Genesis study in the summer, Abraham had his issues. Abraham was a man of tremendous faith many times, and tremendous lack-of-faith at other times. Paul gives us a bit of a rose-coloured-glasses view of Abraham. In general, yes, it is true that Abraham kept going despite the pain.

Paul wants us to know that we may struggle spiritually too. It may be difficult to remain faithful to God. We will have some times of tremendous faith, and we, too, may have some times of fear and doubt. But Paul wants to encourage us to keep the faith, despite the challenges. God loves you. And He always will.

Sheridan Voysey writes, *"Our problems is that we interpret God's love through human love. If we understand God's love to be anything like the distorted, damaging 'love' we've experienced from an abuser, or even the relatively good love of family and friends we will forever feel cold about God's love for us. But there is another way. With God's Spirit, we may begin to grasp God's love not by likeness to human love, but in contrast to it. Here's an exercise to try:*

"Think of the most loving thing someone has done for you. What was it? Perhaps it was a relative forgiving you for something horrible you said, or a colleague opening up a work opportunity for you. Maybe your parents sacrificed greatly so you could go to college, or a friend came to your rescue when you most needed help. Remember the act in detail. Now, even as great as this act of love was, it is tiny in contrast to God's love for you. How tiny?

*"Picture a grain of sand placed next to a skyscraper.
Compare a single microbe to our largest planet, Jupiter.
Picture the tiniest trickle alongside the mightiest of rivers.
Imagine the faintest scent against the strongest perfume.
The quietest bird call against the loudest thunder clap.
Compare a tiny water drop to the Pacific ocean.
The flicker of a candle to the blaze of the sun.
A single lead to a forest of trees.*

"That's how tiny human love is compared to the great love God has for you" (Resilient, pp. 33-34).

What is God saying to you, today?

*O Lord, I pray that from your glorious, unlimited resources
you will empower us with inner strength through his Spirit.
Lord Jesus, may you make your home in our hearts as we trust in you.
Holy Spirit, help our roots grow down into God's love and keep us strong.
May we have the power to understand, as all God's people should,
how wide, how long, how high, and how deep your love is.
May we experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully.
Lord, may we be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.
Now all glory to you, O God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us,
to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.
Glory to you, O Father, in the church, and in Christ Jesus, and in the Spirit,
through all generations forever and ever!
Amen.*

Monday, October 19: Romans 5:1-5

We tend to think “normal” life should be a smooth, comfortable, pleasant experience. If God is with us and genuinely caring for us, we should expect a good life. Problems, struggles and adversity indicate something is wrong. Either we’re making trouble for ourselves. Or God is not living up to His responsibilities. Or God does not really love us.

What is Paul’s perspective? Paul writes, *“We can rejoice when we run into problems and trials (implying we will), for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love”* (5:3-5). Problems and trials, Paul says, are part of life. In spite of them, God absolutely still loves us. These difficulties can actually help us grow in surprising ways, if we allow them to help us depend more on God.

This has been Paul’s experience. Around the same time that he wrote Romans, he wrote 2 Corinthians, in which he comments, *“We patiently endure troubles and hardships and calamities of every kind. We have been beaten, been put in prison, faced angry mobs, worked to exhaustion, endured sleepless nights, and gone without food ...”* (6:4-5). Paul’s life has hardly been a cake walk. And yet, through it all, he has become more joyful, faithful, and content, thanks to his faith.

Psychiatrist and author, Theodore Rubin, comments, *“The problem is not that there are problems. The problem is expecting otherwise and thinking that having problems is a problem.”* We have this unrealistic expectation that life ought to be smooth sailing, so difficulties seem like aberrations rather than the norm. What if we anticipated that “normal” life is actually a challenge; when we have peaceful times, they’re a special treat we can savour and enjoy to the fullest?

Holocaust survivor, Viktor Frankl notes, *“What is to give light must endure burning.”* Difficult times can be very hard; it may feel like we’re burning out. But, Paul wants to encourage us. Those struggles can develop endurance, character, and, ultimately, a deeper appreciation of the hope of our salvation. God is with us right now; He will be with us tomorrow; He will be with us forever. That’s Good News.

“Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God’s glory” (5:2). Pray about the challenges you face, using Romans 5:1-5 as your guide.

*Dear heavenly Father,
Give me clean hands, clean words, and clean thoughts;
Help me to stand for the hard right against the easy wrong;
save me from habits that harm;
Teach me to work as hard, and play as fair in Your sight alone,
as if the whole world saw;
Forgive me when I am unkind, and help me to forgive those who are unkind to me;
And keep me ready to help others.
Amen*

Tuesday, October 20: Romans 5:6-11

I woke up one morning in our rental cottage, in the middle of the Tuscany (Italy) countryside, so dizzy and nauseous I had to crawl to the bathroom on my hands and feet. I felt utterly helpless. All day I was sick. In the evening, Marianne spoke with our landlord, Giovanni, who spoke a wee bit of English. *“Let me make a phone call,”* he said. Within an hour, a doctor was at my bedside (in Italy, a GP is on call for house calls every evening, apparently). In broken English, he said he thought it was vertigo (I had never had it before). Giovanni’s wife drove into Certaldo, 20 minutes away, to get some prescriptions filled.

The next morning, I felt little better. *"I really didn't like the doctor last night,"* Giovanni said, *"so my doctor is coming this morning before office hours."* His doctor thought it was vertigo, too, but also wanted me to see an ear-nose-throat specialist in Sienna, a 45-minute drive away. I was in no condition to drive and Marianne was not insured on our rental car (and did not want to drive standard through the Italian countryside into an Italian city). *Let me make a phone call,"* Giovanni's doctor said. In a few minutes he came back: *"The ear-nose-throat specialist will be HERE at 3:30 pm today."*

It turned out the specialist had an aged mother near where I was, so she drove out 45 minutes, spent an hour with me, then visited her mom. She, too, thought it was vertigo. Total cost: €40 for gas money for the specialist. Within a couple of days I was beginning to feel better ...

When I was utterly helpless, Giovanni – and his wife, two doctors, and the specialist – came at just the right time and helped us out. I couldn't do anything for myself. They did it all. And I am still so thankful.

Scripture deals with bigger problems than bouts of vertigo in rural Italy. Scripture deals with the challenge of human sin. It has been a plague ever since the fall of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3). People are simply unable to live up to the perfection required by God's perfect law. And as a result, we ultimately face separation from God now, and forever.

EXCEPT, *"when we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners"* (5:6). We can do nothing to save ourselves. We are all still "sinners," falling short of God's perfection. But Jesus saved us. He did it all. He restored us into relationship with God, now and forever (what the Bible calls "eternal life"). *"For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God"* (5:10-11).

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt utterly helpless, and someone helped you out? How did that feel? Reread Romans 5:6-11. Spiritually we are all utterly helpless. However, Jesus has saved us. How does that feel? How can we respond to God's amazing love?

*O God, I thank You for this universe, my great home;
for its vastness and its riches,
and for the manifoldness of the life which teems upon it and of which I am part.
I praise You for the arching sky and the blessed winds,
for the driving clouds and the constellations on high.
I praise You for the salt sea and the running water,
for the hills, for the trees, and for the grass under my feet.
I thank You for my senses by which I can see the splendor of the morning,
and hear the jubilant songs of love,
and smell the breath of the springtime.
Grant me, I pray, a heart wide open to all this joy and beauty,
and save my soul from being so steeped in care or so darkened by passion
that I pass heedless and unseeing
when even the thorn-bush by the wayside is aflame with the glory of God!
Amen.*

Wednesday, October 21: Romans 5:12-17

Except for some occasional inconvenience during flu season, over the years I have never really worried about viruses. Thanks to flu vaccines, I've never even really worried about the flu. However, Covid-19 has made us all MUCH more aware of the genuine danger of infectious diseases. They are so insidious and can spread so easily. Without us ever being aware of it, we can catch the bug.

Paul, in line with the rest of Scripture, makes the point that sin is a lot like an infectious disease, like Covid-

19. Without us even being aware of it, we can be infected by a virus that leads us astray. We try to be so careful to stay faithful to God and to do right – and yet, occasionally, we fail. At times, we all miss the mark. We are all infected by a spiritual virus that, once in a while, trips us up.

As with Covid-19, some of us may want to pretend the illness of sin doesn't really exist – it's all a plot hatched by someone else. All this talk of "sin" is fundamentalist nonsense; there is no right/wrong. Or I never do anything that, in my opinion, is wrong – so we can all just stop talking about it.

Or we may think that as long as we're feeling OK, it doesn't really matter. Other people may be "sick" with sin, but I'm not. I'm a good person. I don't intentionally sin. I don't intentionally hurt other people. Therefore, I don't need to be "saved" from anything. I don't need Jesus.

Unfortunately, even though we may not believe in it or try to rationalize it away, the disease called "sin" does exist. And it affects EACH one of us. We may do well 99.9% of the time, but there's that 0.1%.

Poor Adam gets all the blame. The virus began with him. Then, for generations, people tried to stay healthy by following the Old Testament Law. But they just couldn't do it perfectly. Finally, ultimately, salvation comes through Jesus, who takes on Himself all the sin of all people, through all time.

"God's free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins. For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ" (5:16-17).

We all have the virus. We all have sinned. However we are also all forgiven, in and through Jesus. Spend some time in confession and in thanksgiving for the forgiveness – and the new life – we have in Jesus.

*O most sweet and loving Lord, whom I now devoutly wish to receive,
you know my weaknesses and my needs.
You know how many bad habits and vices I have.
You know how often I am burdened, tempted, shaken and stained by sin.
I come to you for healing. I pray to you for comfort and support.
I speak to you, who know all things, to whom all my inmost thoughts are evident.
You alone can adequately comfort me and help me.
You know what good things I need most, and you know how poor I am in virtue.
Look! I stand before you poor and naked, asking your grace and imploring your mercy.
Feed me, for I am hungry. Inflammate my coldness with the fire of your love.
Illuminate my blindness with the light of your presence.
Make all that leads me from you not worth thinking about.
Make me forget it all. Lift up my heart to you in heaven,
and let me not wander aimlessly about the world.
From now on, you will be my only delight, you alone
are my food and drink, my love and joy, my sweetness and whole good.
Oh, that by your presence you would set me fully on fire,
totally consume me and transform me into you,
so that through the grace of inner union I would become one spirit with you.
Do not leave me hungry and thirsty,
but treat me mercifully as you have so often and so admirably treated your saints.
How wonderful it would be if I were burned and wholly consumed for you,
since you are a fire always burning and never consuming,
a love that purifies the heart and enlightens the mind.
Amen*

Thomas À Kempis

Thursday, October 22: Romans 5:18-21

"Marriage," says humourist Erma Bombeck, "has no guarantees. If that's what you're looking for, go live with a car battery." She may be a bit cynical. But she does have a point. For a lot of things in life, there are no guarantees. Weather forecasts are not guaranteed. Our health is not guaranteed. Our jobs are not guaranteed. Our safety on the roads is not guaranteed. We could go on and on.

In Romans, however, Paul is talking about a couple of certainties. One guarantee is that "Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone" (5:18). Because of the infectious disease called "sin," all of us fall short of God's perfect standard for us. And, as a consequence, we all face exile from God. We are separated from Him, thanks to our sinful natures, sinful thoughts, and sinful actions.

But there is another guarantee. "But Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone" (5:18). There is a guaranteed antidote for sin: thanks to Jesus' obedience and death on the cross, our sin can be forgiven and we can come out of exile, into the freedom of God's presence. We can be cured. Guaranteed.

"So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (5:21). Paul is using language reminiscent of the Exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt. Once they were ruled by cruel masters and condemned as slaves in Egypt, for life. But thanks to God's grace, they were brought into freedom. Once we were ruled by sin and condemned as slaves to sin, for life. But thanks to God's grace, we have been brought into freedom. We enter the Promised Land of new life in Jesus.

The Good News is that there no fine print, provisos, quid pro quos, or conditions associated with the guarantee of new life – eternal life – we have in Jesus. Through God's wonderful grace, we have new life – now and forever – through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. It's an unconditional guarantee.

How does that make you feel? How do you live differently, knowing that, by faith in Jesus, your life is safe in His hands – guaranteed?

*O gracious and holy Father,
Give us wisdom to perceive you,
intelligence to understand you,
diligence to seek you,
patience to wait for you,
eyes to see you,
a heart to meditate on you,
and a life to proclaim you,
through the power of the spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

Friday, October 23: Romans 6:1-7

Paul began his life as a Jewish zealot. Like many Jewish people of his era, he believed – passionately – that God would deliver Israel from her Roman oppressors **when** the entire nation confessed their sin, turned to God in repentance, and lived the Old Testament law faithfully. When everyone was following the Old Testament Law, then, and only then, would God save His people.

So Paul's pre-Christian mission was to push everyone he knew to keep the Law more faithfully. He was critical – and violently opposed – to anyone who didn't support his mission. Among those who really upset him were those who followed this strange rabbi, Jesus. Jesus didn't teach unflinching adherence to the Law. And who could believe in a crucified Messiah? Paul (then named Saul) viciously opposed and violently persecuted those who believed in Jesus (Acts 7:58, 8:1-3, 9:1-3).

Acts 9 records how Saul/Paul was confronted by Jesus. He came to realize that salvation was NOT going to come by dogged obedience to the Law, but through faith in Jesus. He came to see Jesus as the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies of a coming Messiah/Saviour.

Now, Paul is talking about "dying to" and "burying" that old life defined by the Law. Instead, we are "raised to life" – born again – into a whole new life, defined by God's grace and freedom. The old angry, violent, Law-bound Saul has been put to death and a new loving, peace-filled, forgiven-by-grace Paul has been born.

Paul describes baptism as an outward symbol of this inner transformation. This passage emphasizes why believers' baptism by immersion is such a powerful expression of faith. A person who has experienced a similar transformation as Paul – from being lost without Jesus to being forgiven and found in Jesus – symbolically "dies" to their old self as they go beneath the water and is raised to a whole new life in Jesus.

Since we are living new lives in Jesus, we ought to live as new people. *"Should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace?"* he asks. *"Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it?"* (6:1-2). We are people defined by our faith in Jesus. We have been rescued by Him from the power of sin and death. Therefore, we are to live as God's grace-filled people.

To the Colossian believers, Paul writes, *"Put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world ... You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world. But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him"* (3:5-10).

What issues might you need to work on? Spend some time praying with God about the struggles you have in your life ...

Tear ducts – the overflow valves of human emotions, a channel for living water.

Dear God – you even gave us a weeping Saviour.

Why did Jesus cry?

Was it empathy with his friends, the bereaved sisters?

Was it compassion for the one who had died?

Was it sadness at the lack of faith around him?

Or was it simply his love?

Dear God – you even gave us a weeping Saviour.

And how we too have wept over time:

tears of sheer inner joy and laughter;

tears of sadness and regret;

tears of grief or compassion for others;

tears of remorse and repentance;

tears of frustration or self-pity;

and tears when there is nothing else we can do but cry.

Dear God – you even gave us a weeping Saviour.

Do you discount our crocodile tears

but cherish the just tears, the faithful tears,

the empathetic tears, the humble tears –

every tear that is shed in love?

Or do you simply weep when we weep, God,

willing that we should use our tears well?

Thank you, God, for the gift of tears.

Thank you, God, for a weeping Saviour.

Amen.

Saturday, October 24: Romans 6:6-11

Paul sees following Jesus as living a while new life. The "old you" is dead and buried and you are now a "new you" in and through Christ. The "old you" – before knowing Jesus personally – was controlled by its passions, emotions, and evil desires – by sin. The "new you" – since knowing Jesus personally – is to be controlled by Jesus, through the Holy Spirit.

In Colossians 3:5-10, which we read yesterday, Paul lists a few of the characteristics of the old you that should be crucified with, dead, and buried with Jesus: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed, anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, dirty language, and lies.

Paul continues talking about the qualities of character that should mark the new you:

"Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

"Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father" (Colossians 3:12-17).

How is this passage an inspiration to you? A challenge to you? What do you need to work on?

Jesus HAS broken the power of sin and death over you. Pray that God will help you be the person He created you to be ...

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,
Where there is injury, pardon
Where there is doubt, faith,
Where there is despair, hope,
Where there is darkness, light,
Where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much
seek to be consoled as to console,
not so much to be understood as to understand,
not so much to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
it is in dying that we awake to eternal life.*

Amen

Francis of Assisi

Sunday, October 25: Romans 6:12-14

We often see our minds, bodies, and souls as separate things. We think that we can THINK something, but that does not affect our bodies or our souls. For instance, we can accept the principles of Christianity and not have it affect anything else in our lives. Or, we can DO something physically, and it doesn't affect our mind or our soul; we can go to church and that's it. Or, we can have a faith (a SOUL thing), without it affecting our thoughts or actions. As a result, some people can claim to be "Christian" and not much changes. This is a very Greek view of the world, which we in Western countries have uncritically adopted.

Paul – coming from a Jewish background – does NOT see things that way. The Jewish worldview – from which both Jesus and Paul come – sees people as integrated wholes. We are holistic beings. So, for instance, if you have issues at work they affect your health, family, faith. If you have health problems, your work and relationships are impacted. If you have a religious faith, that affects everything, too: how you see yourself and your world, what you think, and how you live. When you come to faith in Jesus, it changes and shapes your view on everything, how you live, and how you act. You are most content when your mind, body, and soul are all in harmony: when how you think, act, speak, and live is ALL shaped by Jesus.

Paul says, *"give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God"* (6:13). Jesus changes everything. So ... to repeat the list from Colossians 3, we will NOT indulge in sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed, anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, dirty language, and lies (do you know any people who claim to be Christian who do such things? How authentic is their witness? How content are they?)

Think about the integration Paul is encouraging us to practice (Colossians 3:12-17) again: *"Clothe yourselves with tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful."*

"Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father."

How is God speaking to you through Romans 6 and Colossians 3?

*Grant us a vision, Lord, to see what we can achieve
To reach out beyond ourselves; to share our lives with others;
To stretch our capabilities; to increase our sense of purpose;
To be aware of where we can help; to be sensitive to your Spirit's presence
To give heed to your constant call.
Take me Lord, from busy-ness to the place of quietness
From the tumult without cease into your great unending peace.
Help me then, my Lord to see what I am and ought to be.
Amen.*

Monday, October 26: Romans 6:15-23

When we drive in the UK, we use a GPS. We nickname her "Penelope" (after Lady Penelope in the *Thunderbirds* movie), because she has a delightful English accent. Generally, Penelope is a great help, telling us which exit to take off the roundabout and where to turn next. But occasionally Penelope leads us into trouble. Sometimes she insists on taking us by obscure sideroads, instead of major highways, because it's supposed to be "faster." In the UK, obscure sideroads are inevitably very narrow, one lane tracks between high stone walls or sharp hedges. When you meet oncoming traffic, one of you has to back up. Once, during a torrential downpour, Penelope directed us down a steep, narrow, stone-walled lane with a sign warning of a "Ford" (as in driving through a stream). We chose to ignore Penelope's direction.

Paul challenges us to think about who we listen to for direction in life. Do we listen to passions, emotions and feelings which can lead us astray? Or do we choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living?

Like Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, Paul casts this in intentionally dramatic language. Who is our master? Jesus puts it bluntly: *"No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money"*

(Matthew 6:24). Realistically, the BIG temptations for most of us are money, pleasure (including, but not limited to, sex), and power. Jesus and Paul warn us that we can easily become enslaved to these passions. Ultimately, they deceive, and, bit by bit, destroy us. The wages of sin, Paul concludes – the payment along the way and our ultimate reward – is death.

In contrast, we can choose “freedom.” But freedom, paradoxically, has limits, too. Freedom is not a free for all, where anything goes or do whatever we want. It’s the freedom to choose to do what is right.

Think about driving a car. In order to enjoy “the freedom of the open road” you have to follow the rules. You have to drive on the proper side of the road, stop at red lights, and obey playground zones. Otherwise your “freedom” could have serious consequences for other people and for yourself.

Paul wants us to remember that our “freedom” is predicated upon thinking through what is BEST for the glory of God (what brings Him honour), what is best for us and for others (including following His commands, like the great commands to love God and to love one another). As we face new, and (to overuse the buzzword of 2020) unprecedented times, that means thinking through how we navigate the Covid crisis wisely, for the glory of God, safety of others and yourself. That includes social distancing and wearing a mask in indoor, public places. That is best for others’ safety and for my own, which follows Jesus’ great commands.

God’s commands are not designed to stifle our freedom. They are created to help us live God-honouring, community-building lives that honour God, affirm the value and dignity of others, and bring fulfilment to our lives, as well. Notice the result: along the way and ultimately, God gifts us with life – now and forever. We don’t earn this full and eternal life; it is God’s wonderful free gift to us.

- Have you ever taken a wrong turn? What were the consequences?
- How is God leading you to obedience – to freedom – in His name?

*Lord God, you are everything to me. My spirit rejoices in you, my Savior.
Thank you for seeking me when I was lost and for finding me.
Thank you for choosing me to go forth and bear lasting fruit in your name.
Thank you for enabling me to bear fruit for you, Lord.
Without you, I can do nothing.
You are good, O Lord, and you are always ready to forgive.
Thank you for your plentiful mercy in my life
which I always receive when I call upon you.
You are always there to help me; therefore, I will never be confounded.
You truly are a very present help to me,
and I am receiving your help even now as I pray.
Thank you, Father.
You are my refuge and strength, and because this is true,
I will not fear anything or anyone.
You are in my midst, and I will not be moved.
You are always there to help me speedily.
You are with me, Lord. Knowing this, I will be still.
I know that you are my God.
Thank you for your constant help in my life, Lord.
Amen*

Tuesday, October 27: Romans 7:1-6

I often try to begin each day’s devotion with a bit of a contemporary illustration or question before jumping into the passage. For instance, yesterday, I talked about our GPS, Penelope, who occasionally led us into awkward predicaments, like peering down steep Welsh roads at fords across rushing streams.

In Romans 7, Paul provides us with his own illustration. Think about marriage, he says. For a married person, as long as your spouse is alive, you are bound to them by a covenant, by a law. However, when a death occurs, the covenant is null and void; the law no longer applies. You can remarry.

Romans 7 is about the Old Testament law – not so much ethical principles like the Ten Commandments (those are still valid, godly principles) – but the specific covenant Law about things like circumcision and the Jews' perceived "special status" as the one and only people of God.

Paul's point is that there has been "a death" – the death of Jesus on the cross – so that now the Old Testament covenant Law, including circumcision, is simply null and void. It no longer applies.

We, united to Jesus through faith, have died to the Old Testament Law as well. This is symbolized through our baptism (Romans 6:1-5). We are free to follow a new law, the law of love, established by Jesus.

What the Old Testament Law, did, of course, was highlight just how sinful we all are. All of us fall far short of the perfection modelled for us in the Law. However, since the Law no longer applies, we are free. Again, that does not imply that we can go crazy, do whatever we want, and create our own personal morality. Paul writes, *"As a result, we can produce a harvest of good deeds for God ... Now we can serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit"* (Romans 7:4, 6).

In Galatians 5, Paul writes, *"For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. 14 For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ...*

"When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, 21 envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

"But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives" (Galatians 5:13-25).

What is God saying to you?

*Dear Jesus, help me to spread Your fragrance everywhere I go.
Flood my soul with Your spirit and love.
Fill my whole being so completely that all my life may only be a radiance of yours.
Shine through me and be so in me that every soul I come in contact with
may feel Your presence in my soul.
Let them look up and see no longer me but only Jesus.
Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as You shine,
so to shine as to be a light to others.
Amen*

Mother Teresa

Wednesday, October 28: Romans 7:7-20

Back in my high school physical education days we had an annual assessment called the "Canada Fitness Test" – a standardized test of everything from your time in a medium distance run to the amount of time you could do a flexed arm hang. I tried really, really hard. I even worked out to excel and hopefully earn an "Outstanding" badge (above even gold). I did fine on the running parts. I did horribly on the tests of upper body strength. I never got better than a silver level. There was nothing wrong with the Canada

Fitness Test. I just couldn't meet its standards.

How would I do on the Canada Fitness Test in 2020? I would hate to think. But, as far as I know, the Canada Fitness Test doesn't even exist anymore. Certainly, I'm not required to take it again. Fitness is still important to me. I exercise regularly, try to eat healthy, and keep my weight and blood pressure down. I do these things because I choose to, knowing they are keys to my physical, emotional, and spiritual health. The Canada Fitness Test is no longer the measure I use to evaluate my success.

Paul is saying that this is how it is with us. There is this Old Testament Law. We may try to achieve "outstanding" against the Old Testament Law, but we can't. There's nothing wrong with the Law. It's good. It represents God's standards for a just, equitable, godly society. But, try as we might, we just cannot achieve perfection. We cannot live up to it.

So where does this leave us?

What has Paul said so far? He has emphasized repeatedly that we have "died" to the Old Testament Law. It's there – it's good – but it no longer applies to us. The fact that we fail to meet its standards doesn't matter anymore. It's no longer the measure that is used to evaluate our relationship with God.

A godly character and right choices still matter. We should all live as holy, pure, and godly lives as possible. Those are all keys to our spiritual, emotional, relational, and physical health. But that particular test – the Old Testament Law – is no longer the standard against which our success is measured. Faith in Jesus is.

John writes, *"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has become a child of God. And everyone who loves the Father loves his children, too. We know we love God's children if we love God and obey his commandments. Loving God means keeping his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome"*(1 John 5:1-3). We are saved by faith in Jesus. Then we choose to live God's commands, not because the Law tells us to, but because we love God and love our neighbour; we know these are the keys to a great community and to personal spiritual, emotional, and physical health.

What is God saying to you?

*May there always be work for my hands to do;
May my purse always hold a coin or two;
May the sun always shine upon my windowpane;
May a rainbow be certain to follow each rain;
May the hand of a friend always be near to me, and
May God fill my heart with gladness to cheer me.
Amen.*

Thursday, October 29: Romans 7:21-25

Media personality, Andy Rooney, once quipped: *"I follow the 50-50-90 rule. Anytime you have a 50-50 chance of getting something right, there's a 90% probability you'll get it wrong."* Some principles just seem to be true, don't they?

Paul is introducing us to another fundamental principle: *"I have discovered this principle of life, he says, "that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me"*(Romans 7:21-23). Do you find that principle to be true in your life as well? I do.

"Oh, what a miserable person I am!" Paul continues. When we have this fundamental internal conflict – we know what we want to and just cannot seem to do it – we are miserable. We know we are called to keep God's commands; we know we are called to live holy and right lives, but we just keep blowing it. Try as we

might, we cannot reach our own modest aspirations for ourselves, let alone God's lofty hopes for us. We are frustrated. We are stressed. We are annoyed with ourselves.

Then Paul asks the perfect question: *"Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?"* (7:24). In other words, what's the solution?

"Thank God!" exclaims Paul. *"The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord"* (7:25). Jesus, through His perfect life, His sacrificial death, and His resurrection has paid the price for all the sin and evil in the world. His death has ended the Old Testament Law as the standard by which we are to be judged. We are forgiven and free from God's judgment.

"God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him," John writes. *"This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us"* (1 John 4:9-12).

We are forgiven. We are free. We are now free to love each other in the name of Jesus. What decisions do you need to make? What will you do about it?

*Dearest Lord, may I see you today and every day in the person of your sick,
and, while nursing them, minister unto You.
Though you hide yourself behind the unattractive disguise
of the irritable, the exacting, the unreasonable,
may I still recognize you, and say:
"Jesus, my patient, how sweet it is to serve You."
Lord, give me this seeing faith,
then my work will never be monotonous.
I will ever find joy in humouring the fancies and gratifying the wishes of all poor sufferers.
O beloved sick, how doubly dear you are to me, when you personify Christ;
and what a privilege is mine to be allowed to tend you.
Sweetest Lord, make me appreciative of the dignity
of my high vocation and its many responsibilities.
Never permit me to disgrace it by giving way to coldness, unkindness, or impatience.
And O God, while you are Jesus my patient,
deign also to be to me a patient Jesus, bearing with my faults,
looking only to my intention,
which is to love and serve You in the person of each one of Your sick.
Lord, increase my faith, bless my efforts and work, now and for evermore,
Amen.*

Mother Teresa

Friday, October 30: Romans 8:1-4

The Ontario Provincial Police officer who stopped me for speeding along the Trans Canada Highway in Northern Ontario claimed I was doing 117 kmh in a 90 kmh zone. I was tempted to argue that it was physically impossible for a fully loaded diesel Volkswagen Rabbit to do 117 kmh (it was loaded with all my worldly possessions). But then I remembered I had just come down a long, steep hill, and so, yes, it was conceivably possible I achieved such a stunning speed in a 1981 Rabbit. I was guilty. I was hoping for a warning. But no, I got a ticket for \$35 (this was back in the mid-1980's!).

I was moving from Nova Scotia back to BC. The ticket informed me that, if I wanted to contest the charge, I had to appear in court in person, in White River Ontario, in 6 weeks. That was impossible. The alternative was to pay a fine. I mailed in my cheque.

When we break the law, there are consequences. Sometimes other people are seriously injured. Sometimes we hurt only ourselves. Sometimes we have to "pay the price" (\$35 to the Ontario government).

Paul has been talking about the fact that, even though we may try to do what is godly and good, we mess up. We make mistakes. We deserve punishment for our sins. But, he has said over and over again, we are forgiven through Jesus. *"Now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus"* (8:1). We don't have to pay the price we deserve to pay. Jesus has paid it for us.

The challenge for us, then, is to *"no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit"* (8:4).

As John writes, *"God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us. Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. All who declare that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love."*

"God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world" (1 John 4:13-17).

May God help us live like Jesus here in this world. What does that mean for me?

*The fruit of silence is prayer: Lord grant me silence,
The fruit of prayer is faith: Lord, help me pray.
The fruit of faith is love: Lord, grant me faith.
The fruit of love is service: Lord, gift me with love,
The fruit of service is peace: Lord, help me serve.
Lord, grant me your peace.
Amen*

Saturday, October 31: Romans 8:5-11 (TIME CHANGE TONIGHT – FALL BACK)

The reason you study to take your driver's test and get your driver's license is so you can get in your car and drive. In time, all the rules of the road become second nature – you stay on your side of the road, stop at the red lights, and obey school zones. Following the rules, you have the freedom to enjoy the open road ...

Thankfully, Paul is finally moving on from talking about trying – and failing – to live the Old Testament Law. Now he is talking about what life is like in Jesus. It's really life *"in the Spirit."* Paul equates *"Christ living within you"* (8:10) with *"the Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, living in you"* (8:11). If we love Jesus, then the personal presence of God, His Spirit is within us. Jesus is within us.

In Jewish tradition, the personal presence of God only ever resided in one place – the Temple in Jerusalem. Paul is radically redefining our experience of God. We don't "go to see" God in the Temple (or church). WE ARE the temples of God. His presence is within us. You are *"the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you,"* Paul says (1 Corinthians 6:19). God is not somewhere else: He is within us.

How then, should we live? We should live holy lives, godly lives, "righteous" lives. Of course, we won't be perfect. But we can aspire to live as Jesus would live if He were living in our situation. In every situation, we can ask ourselves a question made popular in the 1980s – WWJD? – What would Jesus do?

Life in the Spirit is a matter of allowing God's Spirit free reign in our lives, to inform, form, and transform us to be more and more like Jesus. It's a process. We don't become like Jesus overnight. But, bit by bit, as we allow His Spirit to mold our mind, shape our thinking, and guide our decisions, we do become more and more the people God created us to be. It becomes second nature. We enjoy the freedom of the open road. What is God saying to me in this passage?

*God is with me,
 but more, God is within me, giving me existence.
 Let me dwell for a moment on God's life-giving presence
 in my body, my mind, my heart and in the whole of my life.
 What most often stops me achieving freedom is my tendency to be caught up in fears and expectations
 about what I 'ought' or 'should' be.
 My usual automatic responses tie me down and inhibit me from exploring new areas of growth.
 I ask and pray for a greater sense of inner freedom and that I might reach
 the fresh and challenging possibilities that God wishes me to realize.
 Help me Lord to be more conscious of your presence.
 Teach me to recognize Your presence in others.
 Fill my heart with gratitude for the times Your love has been shown to me through the care of others.
 I read the Word of God slowly, a few times over, and I listen to what You are saying to me.
 What is stirring in me as I pray?
 Am I consoled, troubled, left cold?
 I imagine Jesus himself standing or sitting at my side, and share my feelings with him.
 I thank God for these few moments spent alone with him
 and for any insights I may have been given concerning the text.
 Amen.*

Sunday, November 1: Romans 8:12-17 (Time Change Last Night – Fall Back)

One of the oldest excuses in the book is "*The Devil made me do it.*" Truthfully, the Devil can't make you do a single thing. He can tempt you. He can mislead you. He can try to trick you. But he has no power to force you to make any wrong choice. You can't blame the Devil (C.S. Lewis has a brilliant book, *The Screwtape Letters* – a collection letters from a senior devil to a junior tempter on how to trip us up; it's an insightful look into how we so easily go astray). Unfortunately, you're on your own when you mess up.

As people living in God's Spirit, however, we have power to resist the Devil's temptations. The Holy Spirit is within us (Romans 8:5-11). And, Paul reminds us, we are daughters and sons of the King of Kings, God Himself. We have the privilege of coming into our Father's presence, to openly and freely talk with Him. He is our "Abba" – the Aramaic word for "Daddy" – our loving, heavenly Father who cares for us intimately. We can bring all our cares, dreams, concerns, worries, hopes, and fears to Him. He delights to talk with us.

So when you feel tempted – pray. When you feel discouraged – pray. When you are joyful – pray. When you are encouraged – pray. When you are suffering – pray. "*Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus*" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). How is God speaking to you, today? What do you need to pray about?

*God of love, out of love you created the world, us, me.
 You put everything together in detailed, delicate ways, knowing our every need.
 Sustaining God, you provide: food that nourishes, water that refreshes, rest that renews.
 You give: emotions that express, art that uplifts, history that reminds.
 You prompt: community that supports, experiences that teach, relationships that inspire.
 God, in all these things, you sustain our being and well-being, together.
 Your love, a resource for our relationships
 with others, with creation, with ourselves and with you.
 Love, informing friendships, joining sister with brother, and parent with child.
 Love, the wellspring of tender, pleasure-sharing, intimate relationships.
 Love, unconditional, forgiving and inspirational, a love embodied in Jesus, which we seek to share.
 God, thank you for your gift of love, which encircles us, sustains us
 and from which nothing can separate us.
 Amen*