

**November 2020**

# **Roamin' through Romans (II)**

**Readings, Reflections, Prayers**

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## Monday, November 2: Romans 8:18-25

*Our prayers this month are from Peter Marshall, a Scottish Presbyterian minister, who, after emigrating to the U.S., was Chaplain to the U.S. Senate ([The Prayers of Peter Marshall](#), edited by Catharine Marshall).*

[Fern Canyon](#), off the beaten path in Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park, California, is well worth the 16 km detour down a gravel road. The deep canyon is a spectacular sight, a hidden paradise of ferns lining a narrow gorge carved out by Home Creek. Some of the seven different types of ferns clinging to the steep cliffs are ancient species, 325 million years old. Living underneath their leafy shade are rare amphibians, including Pacific giant salamanders, measuring up to 30 cms in length.

The trail through Fern Canyon follows a series of small footbridges deep into the gorge. Lush, drooping ferns create hanging gardens, miniature waterfalls pour down rock faces, and moss wallpapers every surface. The walls grow taller and squeeze tighter as you travel. It feels primeval. Steven Spielberg actually filmed a scene for *Jurassic Park II* in this canyon.

But most people drive right past it.

Romans 8:18-25 is one of those passages we often drive right past in Romans, too, hurrying to the climactic ending of Romans 8. But, like Fern Canyon, this passage is well worth a stop. Paul is teaching us that all creation has been affected by human sin. Creation is waiting for (1) God's people to **be** God's people here and now, and (2) for Jesus' return when all things will be completely and finally restored. God's good news is about more than just people and their "salvation" – it's about the rescue and restoration of ALL creation.

Through the cross, God is making **ALL** things new – not just human beings. As humans we naturally focus on the "people part" of the good news – especially the **personal** people part: **I** am saved/**you** are saved by the grace of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus. That is great news. Fantastic news. But God is in the process of redeeming **ALL** of His creation – not just us and not just people. That makes some people a little bit queasy: isn't the good news **ONLY** about us? Romans 8 – and many other passages in Scripture including Revelation 21-22 – challenge us to appreciate that God is more than big enough to renew absolutely everything. God is dealing with ALL of the consequences of evil – in my personal life, in human society, in His natural creation, and so much more. I can't understand all that. But it's wonderful.

*"All creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are ..." (8:19)* In other words, all of creation is waiting for us – God's children (8:1-18) – to **BE** God's children, and to take up the mantle for which we were created: to share His good news, to care for people's needs, to be people of justice and mercy, to be wise stewards of God's creation, and so much more.

Before sin ever entered the world, people – you and I – were placed in God's perfect garden, *"to tend and watch over it"* (Genesis 2:15). We were created to help bring order, peace, and harmony to all of God's creation. That fundamental mandate – part of our core reason for being as creatures made in "the image of God" – has never been revoked. That is still our purpose as renewed, restored, saved people.

Some practical thoughts for all of us:

- Care for people. Be kind. Serve others. Love your neighbour as yourself.
- Try to think and talk about "**God's creation**" – you begin to look at the world differently ... this is not an "environment" to be exploited, but God's creation to be nurtured.
- Reduce, reuse, recycle – this is God's creation. As Christians we should be the most environmentally conscious people around (certainly not the least) – we live in God's art gallery.
- Be aware of how much "stuff" you use in a day – water, gas, food, waste, energy – and try to reduce it, a little bit (or a lot) ...
- Think about some of the BIG issues regarding God's creation today: climate change ... carbon emissions ... waste disposal ... air and water pollution ... How should the people of God respond?

*Lord, teach us to trust in You as a Heavenly Father who loves us  
 and is concerned about what we do and what we are.  
 Forgive us that there are times when we find it hard, when it ought to be easy.  
 It is not that we have no faith,  
 but that we seem so reluctant to put our faith in You.  
 In the news, some people have proven untrustworthy,  
 yet we still trust one another.  
 Banks have failed, but we still write cheques, in faith.  
 Depressions and recessions have upset our economy, but we still carry on business, in faith  
 Blizzards make the winter dreary, yet we plant seeds in the spring, in faith.  
 Hurricanes scream across the land, but we build windmills, in faith.  
 Give us the faith to put our trust in You,  
 who does hold all living things in the hollow of Your hand.  
 Before we blunder may we learn that You are willing to lead us, to show us what to do,  
 And that it is possible for us to know Your will and be partners with You in doing what is right.  
 We open our hearts to You, our Father,  
 and pray that Your Spirit may dwell in us,  
 and give us poise and power.  
 Give us the faith to trust You for guidance in the roads we take and the decisions we make.  
 Amen.*

### **Tuesday, November 3: Romans 8:26-30**

My friend, Harv, and I were following the Opal Peak Trail in Jasper National Park. We decided to push higher than the official trail to a col from which we could look into the neighbouring valley. We were not in great shape, poorly prepared (only a bag of ginger snaps to sustain us), but we pushed on. When we reached the ridge, the view took our breath away. A hidden valley with ridge after ridge of glorious peaks spread out before us. We were speechless. How many people had ever even seen this beauty before?

Paul wants us to be in that place after Romans 8:18-25. After he has told us that that ALL creation is waiting for the people of God to actually **BE** the people of God, to be God's good news in the world, he intends us to be a bit speechless. The good news is far bigger than we might have imagined. It's about loving people. It's also about caring for creation. So what do we do? How do we begin to respond?

*"The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness," Paul says. "For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words ..." (8:26). God can help us work through how we respond to this amazing love, the amazing grace of Jesus.*

*"We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them" (8:28). Note: Paul does NOT say "God causes all things that happen to us." He does say, "When things happen to you, God can work them together for good ..." There is a BIG difference in those statements. Bad things do happen. There is death and decay (8:21). Creation does groan (8:22). But God can bring good things, even out of the most desperate circumstances.*

*"For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son ..." (8:29). We are called to be like Jesus. On the one hand, this means that we have "right standing with God" (8:30). On the other hand, this means that we have the same mission Jesus has: to be God's ambassadors, bringing His good news of love, forgiveness, mercy, justice, and hope to a hope-starved world (8:19).*

We are lights shining in the darkness, with the message of God's new life in a dying world. *"You are the light of the world – like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father: (Matthew 5:14-16).*

*Lord, forgive me that when life's circumstances lift me to the crest of a wave, I tend to forget you.  
 Yet, like an errant child, I have blamed you with my every failure, even as I credit myself with every success.  
 When my fears evaporate like the morning mist, then vainly I imagine that I'm sufficient unto myself,  
 and that material resources and human resources are enough.  
 I need you when the sun shines, lest I forget the storm in the dark.  
 I need you when I'm popular, when my friends and those who work beside me approve and compliment me.  
 I need you more than, lest my head began to swell.  
 Oh God, forgive me for my stupidity, my blindness in success, my lack of trust in you.  
 Be my Saviour in success.  
 Save me from conceit.  
 Save me from pettiness.  
 Save me from myself!  
 And take this success, I pray, and use it for your glory.  
 In your strength I pray.  
 Amen.*

### **Wednesday, November 4: Romans 8:31-39**

For some reason, my parents had to make an outing to Sears in Richmond, BC. My brother and I, quite young at the time, had already gone to bed. Mom and Dad threw some clothes over top of our pajamas, strapped us weary boys in the back seat of the car, and off we went. Well – due to sleep deprivation or just my own stupidity – in Sears I got separated from my parents. I was lost. Alone. Tired. And very cranky.

A kindly store employee found me (yes, I'll admit it) crying in the aisle. She paged my parents on the store speaker system, and very soon all was well.

But during those moments of separation and lostness, I was terrified. I felt like I would never find my parents again. Life as I knew it was over. What was going to become of me?

Paul wants us to know that no one and nothing can ever separate us from Jesus. We are safe, right now and forever, in His hands. We need never be afraid of being all alone. "*I am with you always,*" Jesus promises, "*even to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28:20). How is that good news?

He also wants us to know that nothing can overpower us. We may face storms, temptations, suffering, hardship, and all kinds of evil, but Jesus can get us through. Notice, some of these things may, in fact, happen to us. Paul's point is that Jesus will help us make it through. How is that good news?

What good news from this passage do you need to hear, today?

*Lord Jesus, you know the things that are trembling on my lips,  
 stirring in my heart, and along the corridors of my soul,  
 walking on tiptoe across the cloistered spaces of my consciousness, looking expectantly upward,  
 making prayers without words, breathing aspirations that have only wings.  
 Hear me, I pray, as I call upon you for help, for strength, for peace;  
 for grace, for reassurance, for companionship;  
 for love, for pardon, for health, for salvation – for joy.  
 Hear me, Lord Jesus.  
 Amen.*

### **Thursday, November 5: Romans 9:1-13**

The King of the United Kingdom before Queen Victoria was King William IV (reigned 1830-1837). He had eleven illegitimate children before finally getting married and having two legitimate daughters (both, tragically died young). William had lived with an Irish actress for 20 years – the mother of most of his

children – but they never married. When William died, none of his nine surviving illegitimate children could inherit the throne, of course. Most of his kids did inherit something from their father: his chronic money management problems. Most of them died in poverty. The crown passed to his niece, Victoria.

One of the heartaches of Paul's life is most of his own people, Jewish people, did not accept Jesus as the promised Messiah. Jewish people believed they were saved as children of Abraham. If they obeyed the Old Testament Law, they would just "inherit" salvation. Paul's point, in Romans 1-7, is that no one can obey the Law perfectly; so no one is saved by it. What saves us, then? The death of Jesus, on the cross. He took our punishment and broke the power of sin and death saves us. We must have faith in Jesus. He saves us.

The majority of Paul's Jewish compatriots wouldn't accept that. As a result of their lack of faith, Paul argues, they are not actually legitimate children of Abraham because of their lack of faith. They will not inherit eternal life. After all, Abraham was a man of great faith. Faith, not DNA or the Law, is what saves us.

In Galatians 3:6-9, Paul writes, "*Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith. The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God. What's more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would make the Gentiles right in his sight because of their faith. God proclaimed this good news to Abraham long ago when he said, 'All nations will be blessed through you.' So all who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith.*"

For those of us who are not ethnically Jewish, this is good news. We are saved by our faith in Jesus.

But for Paul, a proud and loyal Jew, this is heartbreaking news. His own countrymen and women – who do not accept Jesus – are left by the wayside. Unless they choose to put their faith in Jesus and believe in God – as Abraham believed in God through faith – they are lost. Only those with faith in the promised Son, Jesus, can inherit the Kingdom of God. It is a matter of faith not ethnic inheritance.

*"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, like putting on new clothes. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you" (Galatians 3:26-28)* – you are blessed to be a blessing. Lord, help us to live our faith as your ambassadors of Good News, grace and love.

*You know, Father, the misunderstandings that have arisen  
between me and other people – friends or family.  
Perhaps I have spoken harsh and thoughtless words.  
I know this rift grieves you;  
you would be far more impressed with the sacrifice of reconciliation on my part  
than with any vows of loyalty or material gift I could make to you.  
I dare not make this a prayer for you to change \_\_\_\_\_;  
this person is your responsibility.  
I know that always I must begin with my responsibility –  
myself and my own shortcomings.  
In subtle ways I confess to you that I have used friendship  
to cushion and make comfortable my own ego.  
All too often I have sought my friends for my own pleasure and convenience;  
all too seldom have I thought of what pleasure I could give.  
You have asked me to love my neighbors and friends to the extent that I love myself.  
That, Lord, would be a lot of loving!  
Enable me now to let all false pride go.  
Give me the grace of the outstretched hand and the open heart.  
Give me the courage that will enable me to go to \_\_\_\_\_ and be the first to say,  
'I have been wrong here and here and here. I'm sorry. Forgive me.'*  
Amen.

## Friday, November 6: Romans 9:14-33

Yesterday, I introduced you to King William IV of the United Kingdom, the predecessor to Queen Victoria. William, the third son of King George III, was never expected to be king. So he was left pretty much to his own devices in his youth. From 1791 to 1811, he lived with Dorothea Bland, an Irish actress, with whom he had 9 illegitimate children (they never married). He left her in 1811 due to money problems.

When it became clear that William would inherit the throne, the challenge was finding a suitable (royal) bride who would have the penniless profligate. Even though he was king, he was broke. His attempts to marry wealthy brides were all rebuffed. Eventually, a German princess was found who was *"amiable, home-loving, and was willing to accept, even enthusiastically welcoming William's nine surviving (illegitimate) children, several of whom had not yet reached adulthood."*

Families can be complicated. Dysfunctional even (remember the Book of Genesis?).

Paul wants us to know that whoever we are – in his case, Jewish background believers or non-Jewish (Gentile) background believers – when we put our faith in Jesus, we are ALL part of the Kingdom of God.

We do ALL, however, have to acknowledge that we're a bit dysfunctional too. We all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But God, through Jesus, saves us and unites us into one amazing family.

Our ethnicity doesn't matter any more. Our DNA doesn't matter. The Old Testament Law doesn't matter (we just can't do it): *"For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile. This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, 'It is through faith that a righteous person has life'"* (Romans 1:16-17).

We are saved by faith in Jesus. Thank God. May God help us to share His good news.

*Forbid it, Lord, that my roots become too firmly attached to this earth,  
that I should fall in love with things.  
Help me to understand that the pilgrimage of this life is only an introduction,  
a preface, a training school for what is to come.  
Then shall I see all of life in its true perspective.  
Then shall I not fall in love with the things of time,  
but come to love the things that endure.  
Then shall I be saved from the tyranny of possessions which I have no leisure to enjoy,  
of property whose care becomes a burden.  
Give me, I pray, the courage to simplify my life.  
So may I be mature in my faith, childlike but never childish,  
humble but never cringing,  
understanding but never conceited.  
So help me, O God, to live and not merely to exist, that I may have joy in my work.  
In your name, who alone can give me moderation and balance and zest for living, I pray.  
Amen.*

## Saturday, November 7: Romans 10:1-13

It would be NICE if all paths led to God. It would be nice if good, sincere people were saved because they are just good, sincere people. It would be nice if everyone were saved, just because ....

We might like if it we could just come up with our own way of getting right with God (10:4). Whatever path we choose, is fine. For Jewish people, that could mean rigorously keeping the Old Testament Law. However, as Paul said in Romans 9:31-32, *"But the people of Israel, who tried so hard to get right with God*

*by keeping the law, never succeeded. Why not? Because they were trying to get right with God by keeping the law instead of by trusting in him. They stumbled over the great rock in their path”– Jesus.*

Unfortunately, the way we wish things were is not necessarily the way things really are.

Paul reminds us again and again that it’s only by faith in God – specifically faith in God’s chosen Messiah, Jesus – that we are made right with God. There are not multiple paths to God, one of which happens to be trying your best to stay faithful to the Law. We are saved by faith in Jesus, and faith in Him alone:

*“If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved ... Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. For ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’”(Romans 10:9-13).*

The good news is we do not have stress unduly as we keep falling short of God’s perfect Law; we are saved by faith, not works. This is not a license to go crazy and do whatever we want to do. It is simply the certain assurance that when we do – accidentally – mess up, God will forgive us.

John is blunt with us: *“If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth.”* That’s a frank assessment, isn’t it? *“But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness”*(1 John 1:8-9).

What do you need to talk about with God? Thank God for His amazing grace.

*Forgive me, O God, for my small concept of the heart of the Eternal,  
for the doubting suspicion with which I regard the heart, love, and wisdom of God.  
Give me more faith! I have so little faith ... or so I say.  
Yet I have faith in people – in cheques and banks, in trains and airplanes,  
in cooks, and in strangers who drive me in cabs.  
Forgive me this stupidity: I have faith in people, who I do not know,  
and yet I am so reluctant to have faith in you who knows us all together.  
I am always striving to find a complicated way through life  
when you have a plan, and yet I refuse to walk in it.  
So many of my troubles I bring on myself. How silly I am ...  
Please give me a faith that I can deposit in the bank of your love,  
so that I may receive the dividends and interest you are so willing to give me.  
I ask this all in the lovely name of Jesus Christ, my Saviour.  
Amen.*

### **Sunday, November 8: Romans 10:14-21**

My kids play a lot of board games – VERY complicated board games. They make games like *Monopoly* and *UNO* feel like child’s play. In some cases, the instruction books alone are dozens of pages long. I was trying to learn to play one of their games, and it seemed to me that they kept inventing new rules all the time. I was about to make a move when I was told, *“You can’t do that, because ...”* I complained, *“But you never told me ...”* And then I remembered they had in fact told me. I had just forgotten. After all, there are just SO many rules. It’s too complicated. I’m just not smart enough. My memory is not good enough.

Paul’s point is that we need to actually HEAR God’s good news if we are going to respond to it. Thankfully, if you have been doing these devotions, I KNOW you have heard God’s good news. You know that we are saved through faith in Jesus to new life, new purpose, and new hope now, and forever.

But what about all the people who have not heard?



In the old days, we used to talk a lot more about "evangelism" (sharing the good news). We had seminars on how to share your faith. We held evangelistic events. We tried to "win" people for the Lord. Even before Covid-19 shut things down, it seemed like no one talked about these kinds of things anymore.

Instead, Christians seem to have become really political and really grumpy. We complain about this. We protest that. They are passionate about their "rights." We post (frankly) hateful memes on social media. Instead of being people of good news – who offer a compelling vision of God's good, glorious, alternative society – we have become Negative Nellies and Grumpy Gus-es with nothing good to say about anything or anyone (even God). Ironically "evangelicals" (literally "good news people") have gained a reputation for being "bad news people."

The reality is, we DON'T live in a Christian culture. I'm not sure we ever did. So we shouldn't be surprised at evil in the world. The people of Jesus have always been counter-cultural people. But rather than displaying this through negativity and abuse, what if we modelled a whole new, **positive** way of living? What if we modelled **joyful** lives, as God intended us to live, through obedience to Jesus? What if we modelled the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? What if we modelled forgiveness and grace? What if we modelled justice and mercy? What if we shared the **good** news in word and in deed? What if we really were "good news people."

I suspect that far more people would be willing to HEAR the good news if we quit griping, complaining, and sniping ... and we simply LIVED and TALKED ABOUT God's good news.

What do you think?

*Lord, what is the matter with me that I am so fitful and moody, so changeable –  
one moment professing my love for you,  
and the next moment yielding to temptations that lure me away from you?  
One moment cheerful, smiling, and kind, and the next, glum and surly.  
Lord, I do not understand myself!  
What a strange creature I am!  
Yet I do not pray, my Father, that always everything should be the same,  
for I would get tired of unending sunshine, and long for a shower of rain.  
I do not pray that my way may always lie on level places,  
for then I would long to see a mountain.  
I do not pray that my lot always be favoured with pleasant strains of music,  
for then I would long for the ministry of silence.  
But I do pray that there might be some pattern of consistency in my relations with you.  
Teach me how to maintain life on an even keel,  
that with a balanced life of faith and trust in you, and kindness and love towards others,  
I will not be at one moment up in the sky and at the next at the bottom of a well.  
Help me to walk with my hand in your hand,  
knowing you yourself came down from the mountain tops to walk in the valleys.  
So may I not give way to despair when I, too, must return to the valley,  
but know that the trail will wind upward again.  
Whether on the mountaintop or in the valley,  
may I always be aware that you are walking beside me.  
And if you are with me, what difference does it make where I am?  
In your name, I pray.  
Amen.*

### **Monday, November 9: Romans 11:1-6**

What does it mean to be "faithful"? One of the questions included in traditional wedding vows refers to a



commitment “to be faithful” to one’s spouse and to them alone. Faithfulness in marriage means your first loyalty – revealed in how you actually live your life day by day – is to your spouse. It’s more than just a nice thing to say. It should reveal itself in concrete action (you give yourself unreservedly to do what is best for your spouse), and non-action (you don’t do anything that is disloyal to or would hurt your spouse).

What does it mean to be faithful to God? Paul cites an Old Testament example. During the days of the evil King Ahab, Elijah and at least 7000 other Israelites kept the faith. That means, on the one hand, they kept actively worshipping and serving Yahweh, the true God. On the other hand, they also didn’t bow their knees to or worship Baal and other foreign gods. More than just saying they believed in God, they literally put their lives on the line by actively worshipping/living for God and shunning evil.

Now, Paul is saying, God has brought all the Old Testament prophecies to fulfilment in Jesus. Those who are faithful to God, will recognize Jesus for who He is – the promised Messiah. They will believe in Him. More than that, they will live lives that actively worship, honour, and follow Him. This will mean putting aside evil ways. It may also mean putting their lives on the line, in order to be faithful. It.

We are saved by God’s grace, and only by God’s grace. We don’t EARN “brownie points” with God by staying faithful. However, our faithful lives – lives of worship and obedience – are our grateful response to the grace God has shown us in Jesus.

In the Book of Lamentations 3:19-24, Jeremiah is weeping over the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of God’s people to Babylon. The world is bleak as bleak can be. Amid this, Jeremiah writes, *“The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss. Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.”* ([watch the hymn inspired by these verses, Great is Thy Faithfulness](#))

God is faithful to us, always. God’s faithfulness is not just a matter of words. He actively cares for and provides for us, day by day. How do we see God’s faithfulness revealed to us?

How can I stay faithful to God? How can I honour, worship, and follow Him?

*Father, teach me that, as your child, worry has no place in my life.  
I know that it helps nothing.  
I know that by worrying I cannot add a single cubit to my stature.  
I know that fretting overcomes no difficulty.  
Often in the past, Lord, I have come to you with heavy heart and burdened life.  
And you have answered my prayers and graciously lifted the burden from me.  
Yet with a strange perversion, I still refuse to leave my burdens with you.  
Always I gather them up – those heavy bundles of fears and anxieties –  
and shoulder them again.  
Do now for me what I cannot do for myself:  
please break these habit patterns,  
reverse the direction of my negative thoughts,  
lift from me once again all anxieties and apprehensions.  
Give me in their place a calm and confident trust in you.  
Make me willing to live just one day at a time.  
May my heart re-echo to your promise that only as I rest in you  
can the desires of my heart be given to me.  
And now help me to do my part by placing a guard around my thoughts,  
by resolutely refusing to return to my old haunts of distrust.  
I thank you for your love for me and for your help.  
Amen.*

## **Tuesday, November 10: Romans 11:7-15**

I'm thinking back to the Book of Genesis. Isaac had one birthright (a double portion of the inheritance) to pass on to one of his two sons, Esau (the oldest) or Jacob (the youngest). Younger Jacob, jealous and greedy, tricked Esau so he got the one and only birthright. Later, nearing the end of his life, Isaac had one blessing to give to only one son. Again, Jacob jealous that the oldest, Esau, should get it, connived so that he received it. When there is a limited amount (or only one) of something – be it a birthright, blessing, or anything else, jealousy, when we act on it, can be a devastating emotion.

However, when there is an unlimited amount of something, jealousy is not really an issue. You can have some. I can have some. We can all have some. And there is still infinitely more to go around.

Paul is saying that God's love, grace, and blessing are an unlimited resource, a well of living water that never goes dry. Jewish people can enjoy God's blessing in Jesus. The Gentiles – non-Jews – can enjoy God's blessing in Jesus. There is more than enough of God's grace to go around.

Many Jewish (and non-Jewish) people in Paul's day would not accept Jesus as the Messiah, of course. Paul is hoping these people will see the hope, peace, love, and joy in the lives of believers, be jealous (in a good way), and come to faith as well. God's blessings are infinite, more than enough for everyone.

Many people today don't accept Jesus as their Saviour either. Paul would hope that people would see the hope, peace, love, and joy of Jesus in our lives and be attracted to Him. We lose nothing if other people come to faith in Jesus. His love, mercy, and blessings are infinite. There's unlimited grace to go around.

Do we think about how our lives do (or do not) present a positive image of faith in Jesus? Do we pray for them? Does my social media presence reflect well for Jesus? Do I live with integrity? Does my life model love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?

How can I model God's hope? His peace? His love? His joy? His good news?

*My Father, sometimes you seem so far away, as if you are hiding,  
as if you are determined to elude all who seek you.  
Yet I know you are far more willing to be found than I am to seek.  
You have promised, "If with all your heart you truly seek me, you shall surely find me."  
And you have assured me that you are with me always.  
Help me now to be as aware of your nearness  
as I am of the material things of every day.  
Help me to recognize your voice with as much assurance  
as I recognize the sounds of the world around me.  
Help me find you now in the privacy of my heart, in the quiet of this moment.  
I would know, my Father, that you are near me and beside me;  
that you love me and are interested in all I do, you are concerned about all my affairs.  
May I become aware of your companionship, as he who walks beside me.  
At times when I feel forsaken, may I know the presence of the Holy Spirit  
who brings comfort to everyone when we are willing to surrender ourselves to you.  
May I be convinced that even before I reach up to you, you are reaching down to me.  
These blessings, together with the unexpressed longings in my heart,  
I ask in the strong name of Jesus Christ, my Lord.  
Amen*

## **Wednesday, November 11: Romans 11:16-24 (Remembrance Day)**

On Remembrance Day we remember we live in a world that desperately needs Jesus. There has been – and still is – much evil in the world. We remember and give thanks for courage and sacrifice of those who

protected and preserved peace and freedom in the past. We remember, give thanks, and pray for those who seek to bring peace and freedom to our world today.

Paul uses the metaphor of a tree to describe the family of God, the kingdom of God, the church. Those who believe in Jesus, be they Jewish-background believers who are like "natural" branches, or non-Jewish/Gentile background believers who are like "grafted in" branches, are all thriving parts of the tree/God's family/the church. Unfortunately, those who do not believe in or accept Jesus as Messiah – be they Jewish or non-Jewish – are not.

It's possible to get a bit smug about this. "*God loves me; I'm saved; too bad, so sad for you ...*" Paul is warning us against such a self-centered attitude. Paul is an evangelist. He desperately wants EVERYONE to be a healthy, thriving branch of the tree. Paul passionately want ALL people – Jewish and non-Jewish – to come to faith in Jesus. He is giving up every comfort, making ever sacrifice, and doing everything possible to make that happen, by sharing the Good News everywhere.

As we learned yesterday, God's love is infinite; there is room for absolutely everyone in the kingdom of God. There can be an infinite number of branches to the tree.

Remembrance Day reminds us that the really important things in life can cost us: time, comfort, security, even life itself. How much are we willing to put on the line for Jesus? How much passion do we really have that other people come to know Jesus?

Do we care more about converting people to our political ideology than helping them know Jesus?

Do we invite people to church online or in person? Or our small group?

Who do you know who needs to be grafted into the tree of life/the family of God? Pray for them.

*Jesus, I come to you for a blessing, to seal within my heart  
the inspirations and memories of your work in my life.  
I ask you for the blessing of:  
quietness when my heart is troubled,  
rest when my soul is weary,  
new faith and courage when I feel exhausted by the tasks of the day.  
I would rest now in you, and find in this hour your stillness and your peace  
to bring me into quiet harmony with your will.  
I give you thanks for:*

- every challenge that this day will bring,*
- every new vision of you that will wing its way across my skies,*
- every whisper of you that I will sense in the beauty of your world,*
- every thought of you that will come in quiet moments,*
- every need of you that will bring me back again to you in prayer.*

*Watch over me through the hours of the day.  
Refresh me in spirit as well as in body.  
Help me to face the tasks of this day with steady faith and without fear,  
conscious of your presence in your guidance, knowing that I am yours,  
as I have placed all my trust in you.  
I know that you are still able to keep that which I've committed to you.  
And now may the love of God the Father, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest upon me  
and abide with me now and forever more.  
Amen.*

## Thursday, November 12: Romans 11:25-33

When a tragedy, like a natural disaster or a pandemic, happens, we want everyone to be saved. Any death toll is too high. However, as deaths from Covid-19 continue to mount, none of us (I assume) takes any joy in a single fatality. We hope and pray that fewer and fewer get infected. We wish that everyone who is ill recovers. And no one else dies. Any death toll is too high.

Paul's great evangelistic hope and prayer is that ALL people – every non-Jewish/Gentile person and every Jewish person – comes to faith in Jesus and is saved, to new life now and forever. Any death toll is too high. He is pouring out his life to that end. He has left his home in Tarsus, sacrificed his comfort, been beaten and abused, been falsely accused and imprisoned, all for the sake of sharing Jesus with all people.

Ultimately, however, it is God's Holy Spirit, working in people's hearts, that leads them to faith in Jesus. We cannot "convert" anyone. Only God's Spirit can do that.

We can be God's ambassadors – people who share His good news, live lives of love and integrity, and model God's mercy and grace. God can use our witness as a means for people to come to faith.

Paul writes, "*Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways!*" (11:33). We do our best to be examples of faith and faithfulness, and then we trust the results to God. God can – and does – still do miraculous things.

How can I live faithfully for Jesus? Who can I pray for, today?

*I dare to pray that something will happen to me in your presence.  
Lord, I know I need to be changed!  
For the visions that once swept across the leaden skies of monotony,  
like white winged calls, have dimmed and faded,  
and I need to see them again.  
Open my eyes!  
Shame fills my heart as I remember the aspirations I've breathed before you,  
the vows I made, the resolves that were born,  
the seedlings of consecration that were planted in my heart.  
I blush to remember the withering blight that touched them all –  
my failures, my shortcomings.  
Lord, I confess before you that:  
I have had longings and nudges from you which I did not translate into action;  
I have made decisions without consulting you,  
and blamed you when things went wrong.  
I have said that I trusted you, yet have not turned my affairs over to you.  
I have been greedy for present delights and pleasures,  
unwilling to wait for those joys which time and discipline alone can give.  
I have often sought the easy way and consistently drawn back from the road that is hard.  
I have been fond of giving myself to dreams of what I'm going to do some time,  
yet have been slow in getting started to do them.  
Forgive me for all the intentions that were born and somehow never lived.  
These, Lord Jesus, are sins, grievous in your sight, grievous in mine!  
And now I claim your promise to change me.  
Please do for me what I cannot do for myself.  
Lead me into a new tomorrow with a new spirit.  
Cleanse my heart, create within me new attitudes and new ideas,  
as only you can create them.  
For these good gifts, I thank you, Lord.  
Amen.*

### **Friday, November 13: Romans 11:33-36**

We live in a time when people are crying out for strong, godly leadership at the international, national, provincial, and local levels. The whole Covid-19 crisis has challenged leaders at every level. Some have responded brilliantly, surprising us with their courage, compassion, wisdom, strength, energy, and calmness. Others have – well – been little less brilliant. As someone who has no ambitions for political leadership, I'm not going to judge those in such positions too harshly. As long as leaders are trying to do what's best for their community – rather than personal gain – I appreciate their best efforts.

Paul is reminding us that ultimately God is the One who is in control. He is the ultimate leader. We can trust Him, absolutely and completely. Our universe, our world, and our lives are safe in His hands.

*"For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen"*(8:36, New Living Translation).

*"For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen"*(NIV).

*"Everything comes from him; everything happens through him; everything ends up in him. Always glory! Always praise! Yes. Yes. Yes."*(8:36, The Message).

Spend some time reflecting on the character and the glory of God. Worship Him. Praise Him. Spend some time bringing anything and everything is your life to Him ...

*O Lord, I pause to look back on the long way you have brought me,  
on the long days in which I have been served,  
not according to what I deserved,  
but by your loving mercy.  
Let me meditate upon the dark nights through which I have come –  
only by your mercy,  
the sinister things from which I have been delivered from, by your grace –  
and I have a grateful heart.  
Let me meditate upon my sins forgiven, for my shame unpublished –  
thank you, O Lord.  
I thank you, O Lord, that, in your mercy,  
so many things I feared never came to pass.  
Fill my heart with thankful praise.  
Help me to repay in service to others the debt of your unmerited benefits and mercies.  
May I be as tenderhearted and merciful as you are,  
May I be as kind, humble, gentle, and patient as you are.  
May I forgive others with same unconditional love and grace  
by which you have forgiven me.  
In his name of Jesus, my Saviour, I offer this sacrifice of praise.  
Amen.*

### **Saturday, November 14: Romans 12:1-3**

The day before our wedding, my buddies and I went for a drive down the French Shore of Nova Scotia (along the Bay of Fundy). It was a hot day, we were wedged into a small car, we were wearing ratty old t-shirts and shorts, we ate take-out scallops and chips ... We went on a couple of beaches and got sand in our shoes. I think I got a soaker from a bigger-than-normal wave. When we got back to Digby we were sweaty, dirty, and smelled like dead fish, seaweed, fried food, salt, and male body odour. Not nice. In fact, downright nasty!

What would need to happen before Marianne's and my wedding? We gents would need to shower and change clothes. (We did!)

On our wedding day, I smelled fine. I had on a clean suit. But more than just cleaning up on the surface, I was aware that something a bit more momentous was taking place. I promised that, *"I take thee to be my wedded Wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I plight thee my troth."*

Then, with the ring, I said, *"With this Ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."*

Paul sees our relationship with God as at least as all-consuming as marriage. Believing in Jesus is more than just the spiritual equivalent of taking a shower or putting on a set of clean clothes. It's a whole-hearted, whole-souled, whole-minded, and whole-bodied commitment. Everything changes.

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

*"I'm speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me, and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him."*

What is Jesus saying to you? How then should you live?

*Forgive me, Lord Jesus, for the things I have done  
that make me feel uncomfortable in your presence.  
The fine front that I polish so carefully for others to see, does not deceive you.  
For you know every thought that has left its shadow in my memory.  
You have marked every motive that curdled something sweet within me.  
I acknowledge, with sorrow and true repentance,  
that I have desired that which I should not have;  
I have toyed with what I knew was not for me;  
I've been preoccupied with self-interest;  
I have invited unclean thoughts into my mind  
and entertained them as honored guests;  
my eyes have often been deaf to your whisper;  
my eyes have often been blind to the signs of your guidance.  
Make me willing to be changed, even though it requires surgery of the soul,  
and the therapy of discipline.  
Make my heart warm and soft, that I may receive  
and accept now the blessing of your forgiveness,  
the benediction of your "Go in peace – and sin no more."  
In Jesus' name.  
Amen*

## Sunday, November 15: Romans 12:4-8

Your body is made up of 2 hands, 32 teeth (28 if you've had your wisdom teeth out), 206 bones, over 600 muscles, and at least 30 trillion (30,000,000,000,000) cells. Somehow our brains coordinate all those bits and pieces so that we can breathe, eat, walk, snowboard, and shovel the driveway. Somehow, too, most of us stay reasonably healthy despite the lack of care – or even abuse – we deal to our bodies.

One of the images for the church is "the body of Christ." The image implies that, just as our bodies have many, many parts, all working together in harmony, the church is composed of many, many people, all working together in harmony (ideally). And just as our bodies are made up of many different parts, each with unique purposes, the church is composed of many different people, each with unique abilities, skills, experiences, gifts, talents, and resources, which they can use to help the church function as a healthy body.

In 1 Corinthians 12:14-26, Paul further develops this image: *"Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. If the foot says, 'I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand,' that does not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, 'I am not part of the body because I am not an eye,' would that make it any less a part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?"*

*"But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. How strange a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, 'I don't need you.' The head can't say to the feet, 'I don't need you.'"*

*"In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad."*

One challenge, of course, is that for a body to be healthy, each part has to actual perform it function. Simply having a large intestine, that has the ability to digest food, is not enough. The intestine has to actual do its job and digest food. In the same way, someone may have a gift, ability, talent, or skill, AND they actually have to use those blessings in order for the church to be healthy.

Often we are hard on ourselves, thinking we have nothing to offer. But be realistic: what skill, experience, talent, gift, ability, or resource do you have? How can you offer that to God?

*Our Father, grant that I may feel your love,  
a love that surrounds me, a love that will not let me go  
but will ever bring me back – back to your side, back to your will, back to your way.  
That is the way in which I would walk.  
O Lord, though all of us like sheep have gone astray, like sheep, we are tired –  
tired of missing your path and stumbling along paths of our own choosing.  
Like a sheep, I want to return to your fold.  
I would come back to you, confessing that I'm not proud the mistakes I've made,  
not too proud of my record as I look back over last year.  
I am conscious not of my successes, but of my failures.  
I am in no boastful mood, O Lord, as I look forward.  
I ask for your forgiveness for my stupidity and my obstinacy, for the blindness of my heart,  
for the wrong choices that grieved you and subtracted from my own happiness.  
Humble and grateful, I open my heart to receive the great miracle of your grace.  
I thank you for the fresh, strong wind of your Spirit  
which comes to bring refreshment, cleansing, and perfect peace. Amen.*



## Monday, November 16: Romans 12:9-21

Jesus' greatest ethical teaching on how to live as God's faithful people is the Sermon on the Mount ([Matthew 5-7](#)). It takes about 10 minutes to read. If you have time today, re-read the Sermon on the Mount. A lot of the themes Paul talks about in Romans 12:9-21 come directly from Jesus' sermon.

In Romans 12:9-21, Paul is giving us an executive summary of important aspects of what it means to live wisely and well, faithfully following Jesus. Spend a moment or two reflecting on each of his points, in turn:

- *Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them.*
- *Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good.*
- *Love each other with genuine affection and take delight in honoring each other.*
- *Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically.*
- *Rejoice in our confident hope.*
- *Be patient in trouble and keep on praying.*
- *When God's people are in need, be ready to help them.*
- *Always be eager to practice hospitality.*
- *Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them.*
- *Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep.*
- *Live in harmony with each other.*
- *Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people.*
- *And don't think you know it all!*
- *Never pay back evil with more evil.*
- *Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable.*
- *Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.*
- *Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God.*
- *Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.*

Which phrase(s) speak to you? What is God saying to you? How then should you live?

*You, O God, are our Father, and to our Father we come in prayer.  
Reassure us that we have a place in your heart  
and are precious in your sight, for so we are!  
We know we have offended You by some of the things we have done.  
We know that You cannot bless all we do  
and You do not approve of all our attitudes.  
Forgive us, Lord.  
Thank you for your grace and mercy.  
But we would hold on to that love You have for each one of us –  
The love that will not let us go and will not turn us off.  
When we are overwhelmed by our sense of littleness in the world,  
may we remember that You have made each of us unique.  
You have given each of us a purpose which, if we fail it, will never be fulfilled.  
Help me to love others as you have loved me.  
As our Lord preached some of His greatest sermons to audiences of one,  
May Your Spirit now whisper to me,  
as I wait upon Him, yielded and still.  
Amen.*

## Tuesday, November 17: Romans 13:1-7

If I were smart, I would have us read Romans 13:1-7 in mid-April, as we're all preparing our income tax returns for 2020 ... Maybe we should read this passage every year at tax time.

Paul is writing Romans during the reign of Emperor Nero, one of the most notorious and corrupt of all Roman emperors. Nero ascended the throne after his mother, Agrippina, murdered her husband (and Nero's great-uncle), Claudius. Nero would have his own mother, Agrippina, killed five years into his reign. A brutal, extravagant tyrant, most Romans considered him impulsive and corrupt. Six years after Paul wrote Romans, the portion of Rome Nero wanted for a new palace just happened to burn down. Nero blamed the Christians. They were brutally persecuted.

Knowing all that background, how do Paul's words in Romans 13 surprise you?

We may be cynical about our politicians. We may disagree with some of their policies. But our government(s) are nothing like as evil and corrupt as Nero and his administration.

Paul, in 1 Timothy 2:1-3, writes, "*I urge you to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Savior.*"

What if we quit criticizing our politicians are prayed for them, instead? Would that make a difference to our country? Province? Community? Would it change our attitudes? Why not try it and see?

- Pray for our Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, Cabinet, and MP, Rachael Harder.
- Pray for our Premier, Jason Kenney, Cabinet, and MLAs, Shannon Phillips and Nathan Neudorf.
- Pray for our Mayor, Chris Spearman, and City Councillors: Mark Campbell, Belinda Crowson, Jeff Carlson, Rob Miyashiro, Joe Mauro, Ryan Parker, Blaine Hyggen, and Jeff Coffman.

Try to pray for our leaders on a regular basis. They need it. So do you.

*I do need you, Lord. I need you now.  
I know that I can do without many of the things I once thought were necessities.  
But without you I cannot live, and I dare not die.  
I needed you when sorrow came,  
when shadows were thrown across the threshold of my life,  
and you did not fail me then.  
I needed you when sickness lay a clammy hand upon my family,  
and I cried you, and you heard.  
I needed you when perplexity brought me to a parting of the ways,  
and I didn't know how to turn.  
You did not fail me then, but in many ways,  
big and little, you showed me a better way.  
And though the sun is shining around me today,  
I know that I need you even in the sunshine,  
and I shall still need you tomorrow.  
I give you my thanks for that constant sense of need  
that keeps me close to your side.  
Help me to keep my hand in yours and my ears open to the wisdom of your voice.  
Speak to me, that I may hear you,  
giving me courage for hard times and strength for difficult places;  
giving me determination for challenging tasks.  
I do not ask for an easy way,  
but just your grace that is sufficient for every need,  
so that no matter how hard the way,  
how challenging the hour, how dark the sky, I may be enabled to overcome.  
In your strength, for you have overcome the world, I make this prayer.  
Amen.*

### Wednesday, November 18: Romans 13:8-14

One of the teachers of religious law, impressed with Jesus' message, asked Him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these" (Mark 12:28-31).

When we studied [Exodus 20](#), back in September, we noted that each of the Ten Commandments actually fits under one of those two headings:

- Commandments 1-4 fit under "Love God with all your heart ..."
- Commandments 5-10 fit under "Love your neighbour ..."

These two commands express in POSITIVE terms (DO love ...) what the Ten Commandments express NEGATIVELY (Do NOT do ...). It's actually far more empowering and challenging to reflect on how we DO LOVE God and DO LOVE our neighbour rather than just following a handful of "Thou shalt nots."

Paul is saying we are under a whole new Law – not the old, negative Old Testament Law – but a new, positive New Covenant Law, a law of love: *DO* love God with your whole being and *DO* love your neighbour.

If we are living by the Law of Love – for God and for neighbour – there are ethical implications. It is like totally changing our clothes. We put off our old set of dirty, smelly, ratty clothes: we no longer participate in the darkness of wild parties and drunkenness, or in sexual promiscuity and immoral living, or in quarreling and jealousy. We put on put on the shining armor of right living: we live decent lives for all to see, clothing ourselves with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. We live as Jesus would live if He were in our shoes.

- What does it mean for you to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength?
- What does it mean for you love your neighbor as yourself?
- How can you "put on the shining armor of right living, living a decent life for all to see, clothing yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ?"

*Lord Jesus, as I look into the future, may no fear assail me.  
Help me to be as confident that you will be with me in the future  
as I know you have been in the past.  
I know that my Christianity is no insurance policy against trouble,  
rather the guarantee that you'll be with me in the trouble.  
That should give me a strong heart and confident faith.  
For so long as you're beside me, loving me, helping me,  
what have I to fear?  
Bless me this day as I try to live as a Christian.  
Where I am inclined to be satisfied with myself as I am,  
make me willing to be changed.  
Give me a more sincere kind of faith, a stronger faith,  
a more live-able faith,  
not a religion that only smacks of Sunday,  
but the kind of faith that can be used on Monday  
and will not have evaporated by Saturday.  
Hear me as I pray, standing on the threshold of time.  
You alone can equip me for the tasks and duties that are mine.  
May I may do my very best.  
In your strong name I pray.  
Amen.*

## Thursday, November 19: Romans 14:1-6

Writing to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul says, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:31-32). Be kind to each other. Be tender-hearted. What does that look like in November 2020?

In Paul's day, many religious people chose to be vegetarians. The reasons back then were quite different from the reasons people today choose that option. In Paul's day, most Jewish-background believers were careful of eating meat because it might not be "kosher" – prepared in the right way. Many Christians, from a non-Jewish background, were concerned that meat sold in the marketplace had actually been offered as a sacrifice in pagan temples: was it acceptable for God's people to eat meat that had been offered to idols (see 1 Corinthians 8 for more on this). Or was it wrong? Ought they leave that past behind completely?

Paul's counsel is that all food (including meat) comes from God and is therefore fine to eat. However, if eating such meat causes a stumbling block for someone else, you should choose to abstain from eating meat offered to idols, in order to be kind and tender-hearted and love your neighbour as yourself.

Paul also addresses holy days – both Jewish holy days and pagan holy days. Every day is a gift from God. Neither is more or less special. But again, the issue is treating one another with kindness and love.

For us, these specific issues – diet and holy days – may not be pressing issues. However through years issues like dancing, playing cards, (moderate) alcohol consumption have all been topics of debate.

In 2020 we have unique "issues." Our City and church council has mandated that we wear masks for services and for groups meeting in the church: some people consider this unnecessary and over-reaching. Others consider it good health and safety practice. We are being asked to "err on the side of caution" – to wear masks – in order to be kind and show tender-hearted love to one another. We do it for the good of the person next to us – who may be caring for an aging relative, have immune-compromised issues, or anxiety and stress. It's about the other person. It's not about me. We want "want to please the Lord and give thanks to God" (14:6). So we just do it.

What other issues like this are there in our world today? How can we be kind to each other, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you? What is God saying to me?

*Father, I'm beginning to know how much I miss when I fail to talk to you in prayer,  
and through prayer to receive into my life the strength and guidance which only you can give.*

*Forgive me for the pride and the presumption  
that make me continue to struggle to manage my own affairs  
to the exhaustion of my body,  
the weariness of my mind,  
the trial of my faith.*

*In a moment like this I know that you could have worked your good in me  
with so little strain, with so little effort.*

*And then you would have been given all the praise and glory.*

*When I neglect to pray, mine is the loss.*

*Forgive me, Lord.*

*I pray that no future forgetfulness of mine,  
or a false sense of self-sufficiency, or spiritual laziness,  
or doubt of your faithfulness keep me from taking everything to you in prayer.*

*I thank you that the fresh breath of heaven is blowing away the close,  
damp air of all my failure, of every doubt and fear.*

*I ask you for that soul tonic of prayer that shall reburnish my faith, brighten my hope,  
revive and rekindle my love. In your name, I pray. Amen.*

## Friday, November 20: Romans 14:7-13

In August, I read [an article about the challenges of being a pastor in the era of Covid-19](#). The author, who interviewed several pastors, noted that *"One pastor shared that the survey results the congregation took about whether they should return to in-person worship or not resulted in a nearly perfect 50/50 split, with several members writing in the comments section that they would leave if the church (1) didn't open immediately or (2) attempted to open at all."* This kind of polarization can be depressingly familiar in churches – and in society at large.

In Paul's day, some believers, with serious perspectives on morality, saw the world as wicked, corrupt, and pagan. The best way to deal with it is to shun it completely; if that meant not buying meat, so be it. You need to follow the rules and "look" Christian. So when those believers saw others, who claim to be Christian, buying meat which had probably come from a pagan temple, they would be appalled. Those Christians should be roundly called out and condemned for compromising with the devil.

Those other Christians, however, may have come to know the deep and rich truth that the one true God is that creator of all things. The whole world – including whatever piece of meat you might buy – belongs to Him. Yes, we are called to a lifestyle of holiness, but that manifests itself in an inner transformation and a personal relationship with Jesus. It is not expressed through following external rules and regulations, as it was in Old Testament times. For these folks, believers who are caught up in rules and regulations are small-minded legalists, who have missed the grace and freedom that come through faith in Jesus.

What Paul is calling for is mutual respect – the kindness and tender-hearted love we talked about yesterday. *"Decide to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall,"* Paul says (14:13).

What issues divide Christians in 2020?

How can we agree to disagree and still love one another?

How can we live in ways that that don't cause our neighbour to stumble and fall, but build one another up?

*O Lord Jesus, I remember that you have said:  
'Do not lay out for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust corrupt.'  
Deliver me from falling in love with things – mere idols.  
Help me rather to love people, to love principles, to love righteousness, to love you.  
You have commanded me to 'seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,'  
and then you promise that if my heart and mind and soul and will are thus dedicated,  
I should receive as dividends at the very things I seek –  
and abundant ministry to all my needs.  
Oh God, help me to believe this.  
Help me to practice it, that I may find for myself that the promise is true,  
that all my needs shall be met.  
You have invited me 'to ask, to seek, to knock' –  
assuring me that if I ask, it shall be given to me;  
if I seek, I shall find;  
if I knock, it shall be opened to me.  
Help me to believe that, O God.  
Give me the faith to ask, knowing that I shall receive.  
Give me the faith to seek, believing that I shall surely find.  
Give me the faith and persistence to knock, knowing that it shall be indeed opened to me.  
Help me to live the Christian life in daring faith and humble trust,  
that there may be worked out in me, even in me, your righteousness and goodness.  
With a sense of adventure, I make this prayer.  
Amen.*

## **Saturday, November 21: Romans 14:13-23**

Tom Wright writes, *"The snow was heavy that night – so heavy that by the time they opened the curtains they could only just see the top of the garden gate. There must have been at least three feet of the stuff. At the breakfast table, the son reminded his father that he'd promised to give him some work to do around the place to earn some extra pocket money.*

*"All right,' said his father, 'We're going to have to get out of the front gate. I think you could start by digging out the path.'*

*"The son, eager for his pay, put on his boots and coat, grabbed the shovel, and began work. He was fit and strong and soon got into the swing of it. Shovelfuls of snow flew this way and that. He kept his head down, concentrating on making a good, complete job of it. Eventually he stood up, drew breath and looked with satisfaction down the length of the path. You could now walk all the way from the house to the gate.*

*"His father came out. 'Well done,' he said. 'Come and have a cup of coffee and get your pay.'*

*"But as they were going inside, they heard a voice from the neighbour's steps: 'Then will you come and clear away all the extra snow you've put on **my** path?' ...*

*"Paul's supreme concern in this passage is the danger of so clearing your own path that you end up making it impossible for your neighbours to walk down theirs."*

It is all too easy, in sorting out our own lives and coming to grips with who we are as believers, to make things harder, not easier for those around us.

There are lots of issues on which we may differ with other Christians. We all have to "make our mind up" on everything from politics to alcohol, from social issues to ethical issues. We may not come to the same conclusions. That's OK. We can be believers and have differences of opinion. When we do make our mind up, we have the well-being of others as our main concern, not ourselves. In the kingdom of God, we sacrifice our "rights" for the welfare of others. It's not about "me" – it's about you. (During this whole Covid-thing, I have heard so many Christians claiming their "rights" ... where is that in Scripture?)

How is this different from society at large? Why is this so difficult for us to put into practice?

In practical terms, what is God saying to you?

*Our Father, give us the faith to believe that it is possible for us to live victoriously  
even in the midst of dangerous opportunity that we call crisis.  
Help us to see that there is something better than patient endurance or keeping a stiff upper lip,  
and that whistling in the dark is not really bravery.  
Trusting in You, may we have the faith that goes singing in the rain,  
knowing that all things work together for good to those who love You.  
We are so often confused and live at cross-purposes with you and one another.  
Help us see things from your viewpoint and that we might see them as they really are  
and make wise decisions, with prayer upon our lips, for our wisdom fails us.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
Amen.*

## **Sunday, November 22: Romans 15:1-6**

A few years ago, Marianne and I had the privilege of spending a few days in Venice, Italy. The whole city – churches, cathedrals, palaces, houses, and hotels – seems to float on the surrounding sea and the canals. It's amazing to me that an entire city, built in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance is still standing. How did

they do it? Well, each building is actually built on wooden piles pounded deep into the seabed. So, when the great stone bell tower in St. Mark's Square collapsed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, to rebuild it they again drove hundreds of wooden piles into the seabed and rebuilt the huge stone tower on top of them. Of course, as a tourist you don't see the thousands of wooden pilings holding the city up. But they're there. And without them, Venice would cease to exist.

As Paul has talked about unity in the church – showing kindness and tender-hearted love to those who may differ with you (*"We who are strong must be considerate of those who are sensitive about things like this. We must not just please ourselves. We should help others do what is right and build them up in the Lord"* (15:1-2)) – he has so far not talked about the foundation. How is it possible to live this way?

The reason we bear with one another and care for one another is because of the example of Jesus: *"For even Christ didn't live to please himself"* (15:3). That's our foundation.

Think about it. What if Jesus had claimed His "rights"? He could have simply minded His own business and stayed a carpenter; that was His right. Why should He become an itinerant teacher? He could have still taken on a teaching ministry but stepped aside when the going got tough; that was His right. Why should He take on the powers-that-be? When He was dragged before the Chief Priest and Pilate, He could have apologized and slunk away; that was His right. Why should He be crucified? He did not deserve it.

But Jesus chose to do what is best **for us**. Even though it cost Him everything. In Philippians 2:1-8, Paul writes, *"Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too."*

*"You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had: Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross."*

Jesus gave up His "rights" **for us**. How can we be like Him and show love to others?

*Forgive me that as I have grown, my faith has been blighted with doubts,  
withered with worry, and tainted with sophistication.  
I pray, Lord, that you would make me like a child again in faith – not childish, but childlike  
in the simplicity of the faith that is willing to trust you,  
even though I cannot see what tomorrow will bring.  
Please give me that childlike faith,  
that simplicity of mind which is willing to lay aside all egotism and conceit,  
which recognizes vanity for what it is –  
an empty show which shows I am incapable of thinking the thoughts of God –  
which is willing to be humble again.  
Then may I feel once more as the child who whispers his love to you,  
tracing with chubby little fingers the pictures of Jesus in a picture book –  
those pictures that portray you, Lord Jesus, with a hurt lamb in your arms or a child on your knee.  
Help me, even now, to feel again like that,  
that I may be as loving, as trusting, as innocent, as grateful, as affectionate.  
And as I am willing to kneel again as a child,  
may I discover the glory you have revealed again,  
and find the wonder of it gripping my heart and preparing me for your peace.  
So shall I, along with the children, enter into the kingdom of God, and know it, and feel it, and rejoice in it.  
In your name, who dared to come to earth as a little child, I pray. Amen.*



## Monday, November 23: Romans 15:7-13

One of the most powerful sermons I ever heard was in York Minster, a grand old Gothic Cathedral in northern England. It was preached by the Archbishop of York, the second most senior cleric in the Church of England (second only to the Archbishop of Canterbury). I would have expected the Archbishop of York to be a dapper Caucasian Englishman with a refined Oxford-Cambridge accent. Dr. John Sentamu, the Archbishop, was, in fact, a fiery black Ugandan, with a decided African accent.

It was inspiring to me to see that the Anglican Church in the UK had a Black African in their senior ranks. This is what the church, at its best, should be: a multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multicultural family united by its foundational commitment to Jesus. Jesus unites them.

Paul wants the Roman house churches – a hodgepodge of Jewish-background believers and Gentile-background Christians – to appreciate that they are united by their foundational commitment to Jesus, too. They may come from many different ethnicities, cultures, and religious backgrounds, but, as followers of Jesus, they are one body, united by their Saviour and Lord. Jesus unites them.

*"Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you, so that God will be given glory,"* Paul says (15:7). Jesus has welcomed all of us – Canadian-born, Asian-born, African-born, European-born, anywhere-else-born – into His Kingdom, as we put our faith in Him. Jesus has welcomed us all – with all our various understandings on all sorts of different issues from politics to social values – into His Kingdom as we put our faith in Him. We are all one in Jesus. May we celebrate our diversity-and-unity in Jesus! Jesus unites us.

Paul concludes with these words, *"I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit"* (15:13). May we know His joy, peace, and hope.

And may we truly be united by the truth that Jesus is Lord. May nothing separate us from one another or from Him.

*Father, I am tired, wearied with the strains of life,  
the pressures under which I'm forced to live.  
You did not design me to live like this.  
I thank you, my Father, for a moment like this.  
May I forget the sounds that have beaten upon my eardrums with relentless monotony.  
I thank you for a moment in which I can no longer hear the chattering of computer keys,  
jingling of bells, jangling of money on counters,  
whining of cash registers, ringing of telephones, and noise of traffic.  
And now, I forget all these – and think only of you.  
Please make within my heart a quiet place.  
I release to you my demand to see what the future holds.  
I rest in you, content to know your love and care in this present hour.  
I release to you my struggle to cram too many activities into every hour.  
I rest of the knowledge that all of eternity, an infinitude of time,  
is your great gift to me.  
I release to you the greed and over-ambition  
that has made me try to grasp too much of life too quickly.  
Help me to be content with simple tasks directed by you,  
done heartily and joyously as unto the Lord.  
Amen.*

## Tuesday, November 24: Romans 15:14-24

At one point in my early 20's, a friend, Roger, and I were making plans to travel around the world. In those days you could buy a plane ticket that allowed you ten stops, anywhere you wanted, as long as you kept moving in the same direction (i.e. always going from east to west or from west to east). We talked a lot about it. We made tentative plans about where we'd like to go. We even got passports. But for a variety of reasons, our plans never came to pass. Roger got married. I went back to university.

Paul really wants to go to Spain (15:24). Unlike Roger and I, however, Paul very much saw himself as on a mission from God. His calling had always been as a "pioneer missionary" – sharing the Good News and planting new churches in places where Jesus had never been heard of before. Other people were good church builders and pastors, but Paul knew his gifting was as an evangelist to unreached peoples.

Paul's plan, then, is to visit Rome en-route to Spain. Paul is not intending to stay in Rome – after all there is a thriving church there already. But Rome is on the way to Spain. And since no one has yet brought the Good News of Jesus to Spain, Paul is anxious to go. He loves a challenge. And starting new churches in Spain would certainly be a challenge.

Unfortunately, Paul's plans won't work out. Paul returns, first, to Jerusalem. There he is arrested. Eventually he is sent to Rome – in chains as a prisoner. He would never leave Rome. He would be executed by the Emperor Nero in the mid-60's AD.

Despite the fact that Paul never got to Spain, God did amazing things through Paul. For instance, the reason Paul wrote this letter to the Romans was because he wants them to know he is planning to visit them on his way through. If Paul had not been planning to go to Spain, he would never have written Romans.

The reality is that other evangelists did get to Spain in the 60's AD anyway. But Paul's planned journey – though it never actually happened – has left us with the rich legacy of **this letter**. We should never underestimate what God can do through small things we see as steps to a larger end.

Our grand plans may not always work out either. But who knows what God can do through the small things in our lives too? Who knows what difference that phone call you make today might make? Who knows what impact that word of encouragement you will share today might have? Who knows how your act of kindness today might change a life?

Just do it. And leave the results to God.

*Father, I know it is not right for so much of my hope, joy, and peace  
to be stolen from me every day.  
Yet sometimes there seems to be no escape from the treadmill of my daily life.  
I ask you to help me, to guide me into a finer way of living.  
Check my impulse to spread myself so thin that I am exposed to fear and doubt,  
to the weariness and impatience that makes my temper wear thin,  
that robs me of peace of mind,  
that makes skies gray when they should be blue,  
that stifles a song all along the corridors of my heart.  
May I have:  
the mercy of God to forgive me;  
the strength of God to make me resolute to do your will;  
the grace of God to be kind, tender, and affectionate to others;  
the patience of God to believe in the ultimate triumph of his kingdom on earth.  
This I ask in his name, in whom all peace resides.  
Amen.*

### Wednesday, November 25: Romans 15:25-33

Like many churches, we have a prayer chain. When we are aware of a need, that concern or praise item is passed along to all of the members and (hopefully) we all pray about it. Some of the needs passed along the prayer chain are from our own church, some from our own city, some from across the country, and some even from other parts of the world. One of the amazing things about prayer is that you can pray for anyone, anywhere, any time. You don't have to be physically with the person you are praying for (although that can be extra special).

One of the interesting dynamics of this Covid-era is that we have been less able to be physically with some of the people we care about and are praying for. That doesn't reduce the effectiveness of our prayers one bit, however.

As Paul asks for the Christians in Rome to pray for him – Jewish-background Christians and Gentile-background believers – he knows that distance doesn't matter. God hears the prayers of Christians in Rome just as much as He hears the prayers of believers in Corinth, Greece (where Paul is writing from), just as much as He hears the prayers of the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem (where Paul will travel to).

Paul asks for prayer as he takes an offering, which he has gathered from the churches in Greece, to the church in Jerusalem. Some Jews, hostile to Jesus, might make the journey dangerous. And some Jerusalem Christians, being proud Jews, might not want to accept "Gentile money."

Paul's journey to Jerusalem is recorded in Acts 21-23. One part of their prayer is answered: the money is received well; the Jerusalem Christians are gracious. Another part of their prayer is not answered: things with the Jewish authorities don't go well. Paul is arrested. There is a plot to kill him. He is transferred to a prison in Caesarea (Acts 23-26). Eventually he will be sent as a prisoner to Rome (Acts 27-28).

How come God answers some prayers positively, but others not so well? We have no idea. It is one of the mysteries of life that *"My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the Lord. 'And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts'"* (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Ultimately, Paul, despite his chains, will have the opportunity to preach the Good News to leaders in Jerusalem, to Roman officials in Judea, to King Agrippa, to Roman officials in Rome, possibly even to Caesar. By answering "No" to Paul's prayer for protection, God opened up other opportunities for service.

We never know why God does or does not answer prayers as we'd like. God can, however, provide opportunities for us to share our faith, encourage others, and build others up wherever we are, whatever our circumstances. Will we trust God, even when things don't go as we'd like?

*God of our fathers and our God, give us the faith to believe  
in the ultimate triumph of righteousness,  
no matter how dark and uncertain are the skies of today.  
We pray for the bifocals of faith – eyes that see the despair and need of the hour,  
but also see, further on, the patience of God working out His plan in the world he has made.  
Make our faith honest by helping us in this day to do one thing because You have said, "Do it!"  
And to abstain from doing the other because you have said, "You shall not do it!"  
How can we say we believe in You, or even want to believe in you,  
if we do not do what you tell us to do, or do those things you tell us not to do.  
May our faith be seen in our works.  
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord,  
Amen.*

## Thursday, November 26: Romans 16:1-16

I opened the email. I started reading. It made no sense. What is this all about?

A minute or two later I got a second email: "*Sorry I sent my pervious email to the wrong 'Bruce.'* Please just ignore it and delete it." Now I understood.

Reading Romans 16:1-16 feels a bit like we're reading Paul's personal email, intended for twenty-five other people (there are twenty-five believers in Rome mentioned), and dozens of other people in the churches that meet in various households.

What's interesting is that there are Jewish names, Greek names, Roman names, men's names, and women's names in the list. The church in Rome is a diverse bunch, to be sure. What's significant about some of the women is that they include a deacon (Phoebe, 16:2), a pastor/evangelist (Priscilla, 16:3), and an apostle (Junia, 16:7). Women are key leaders in the church.

The beauty of a passage like this is that it reminds us that each one of us is a treasured, important part of God's church. Jesus knows each of us by name. If He were writing to us, as a church, He would mention each of us, personally. While some people may be "co-workers" in more formal ministries – from teaching Sunday School to serving on Council – others are like Rufus' mother (16:13) – mothers in the faith to younger folks, and people who just live for Jesus, day in and day out.

Be encouraged. He knows your name. Check out the song by Tommy Walker: [He Knows My Name](#)

*I have a Maker; He formed my heart.  
Before even time began, my life was in his hands.  
He knows my name. He knows my every thought.  
He sees each tear that falls, and He hears me when I call.*

*I have a Father; He calls me His own.  
He'll never leave me, no matter where I go  
He knows my name. He knows my every thought.  
He sees each tear that falls. and He hears me when I call.*

*Father, I ask you to take from me now all that harasses and annoys,  
all that has laid upon my heart burdens of anxiety and care,  
all the guilt and shame that weighs me down.  
I thank you for the stillness of this time of prayer –  
this oasis in my busy day when I can relax before you,  
lay my burdens down, and hand over to you all my anxieties, failures, and aspirations.  
At this moment, I open my heart to receive your blessing, knowing that in your presence:  
the furrows are being smoothed from my brow, the lines from my face,  
the load from my heart, the doubts from my mind,  
the fears from my soul, the lost hopes from my dreams – and I am at peace.  
And now I thank you, not only for quietness without,  
but for the quietness at the heart of the universe and for quietness within.  
In your peace, I pray.  
Amen.*

## Friday, November 27: Romans 16:17-23

Tom Wright comments, "*It had been a difficult meeting. Several complex issues had been on the table, some of them involving delicate political issues, others involving money. It was right at the end of a busy university term, and everyone was tired and inclined to be scratchy and cross. Finally the debates were*

*finished, the votes were taken, and we all retired for a cup of tea. On the way out of the room one of my colleagues, a distinguished historian, turned to me.*

*"I know our Lord told us," he said, "to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. But, being busy people, some of us find it advisable to **specialize**." No prizes for guessing which side the specialization tended to fall on."*

Paul, in Romans 16, is echoing Jesus' words in Matthew 10:16: *"I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves."* He wants the churches in Rome to grow up and learn how to understand, in love, that there is an ever-present danger of false teaching in the church. And there is also the opposite danger: thinking there is false teaching in the church when, in fact, there is not – just differences of opinion.

We live in a world where there are strong, well-articulated opinions on all sorts of issues, from which political agenda is more "Christian" to vaccines, from climate change to economic recovery. Just because there are lots of opinions out there on social media, however, does not mean that each opinion is equally valid. Anyone can post anything online and appear to be an authority. Our challenge is to use our God-given minds to evaluate the supposed authority and to make sure we are trusting wise, knowledgeable sources. Falling for the latest conspiracy theory is not a sign of spiritual (or any other kind of) maturity.

In Romans, Paul is focussing on spiritual truth. How do we know who are good and who are false Christian teachers? Paul highlights two criteria to discern false teachers (16:17):

1. False teachers cause divisions. If a teacher is claiming they – and only they – have a corner on truth and everyone else is wrong, chances are they are the ones with the problem. If they are denouncing, condemning, and judging other good Christian teachers, they are the ones with issues.
2. False teachers upset people's faith by teaching things contrary to what has been taught. False teachers may take one or two verses out of context and build a "new" theology. Their teaching may differ radically from the testimony of 2000 years of godly understanding. In theology, novelty is not a good thing. Good teachers, in fact, don't mind having their teaching fact-checked against the entire scope of Scripture and good, historic Christian interpretation through the ages.

False teachers, Paul emphasizes, are not serving Jesus or the church, they are *"serving their own personal interests"* – literally filling their own bellies (16:18). Being a leader is about servanthood, not self-interest.

There are still false teachers about: those who sow division, claim insider-knowledge, mercilessly critique other good teachers, and claim to have found a "new" truth. Our challenge is to not fall for the latest conspiracy theory (even if it sounds attractive), but to measure teaching against Scripture.

May God give us wisdom, in all aspects of our lives, to discern truth. May God help us to discern error. May God help us to be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves.

*Our Father, give us the faith to believe that it is possible for us to live victoriously  
even in the midst of dangerous opportunity that we call crisis.  
Help us see that there is something better than patient endurance or keeping a stiff upper lip,  
and that whistling in the dark is not really bravery.  
Trusting in Thee, may we have the faith that goes singing in the rain,  
knowing that all things work together for good to them that love Thee.  
Amen*

## **Saturday, November 28: Romans 16:25-27**

Way back when I used to play rugby. One of the unique features of rugby is the scrum, when eight players from each team crouch down, lock arms (and legs) and push against each other for control of the ball.

Sometimes the whole scrum just collapses into a mess of 32 legs, 32 arms, and all sorts of other body parts all in one big mess.

To be honest, Romans 16:25-27 is a bit like a collapsed rugby scrum: 53 words (in Greek) all jumbled together. Trying to make sense of them can be challenging. One of my professors, who helped with the New International Version translation, said these verses were among the hardest to translate in a way that made sense. It's like Paul has so many thoughts running through his brain and they all just spill out into the letter. See how various translations have tried to make sense of it:

*"Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith – to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen."*(New International Version)

*"Now all glory to God, who is able to make you strong, just as my Good News says. This message about Jesus Christ has revealed his plan for you Gentiles, a plan kept secret from the beginning of time. But now as the prophets foretold and as the eternal God has commanded, this message is made known to all Gentiles everywhere, so that they too might believe and obey him. All glory to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, forever. Amen."*(New Living Translation)

*"All of our praise rises to the One who is strong enough to make you strong, exactly as preached in Jesus Christ, precisely as revealed in the mystery kept secret for so long but now an open book through the prophetic Scriptures. All the nations of the world can now know the truth and be brought into obedient belief, carrying out the orders of God, who got all this started, down to the very last letter. All our praise is focused through Jesus on this incomparably wise God! Yes!"*(The Message)

*"Let's give glory to God! He is able to make you stand firm in your faith, according to the Good News I preach about Jesus Christ and according to the revelation of the secret truth which was hidden for long ages in the past. Now, however, that truth has been brought out into the open through the writings of the prophets; and by the command of the eternal God it is made known to all nations, so that all may believe and obey. To the only God, who alone is all-wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever! Amen."*(Good News Bible)

Paul is clearly really excited about the Good News. He's really excited that it is for ALL people – Jewish and non-Jewish. And the heart of the Good News is Jesus. Are we as excited about Jesus? Are we excited for other people to know Jesus? With Christmas coming, pray for the opportunity to share your excitement!

*Lord, you said that our Father in heaven notes even the fall of a sparrow to the ground.  
Help me to believe, O God, that you are concerned  
not only with the rolling of the spheres in their orbits,  
but even with me, my doubts, and complexities.  
I know all too well the bitter results when I've tried to run my life my own way,  
when I try to steer my own craft.  
Please come aboard, Lord Jesus, and set a true course,  
for I am weary of life's demands, tired of my own blundering ways.  
Please give me a clear light to shine upon my troubled way.  
Please give me clearer directions.  
Where I have missed the way and wandered far,  
please bring me back at whatever cost to my pride.  
Please take away my stubborn self-will,  
for I know that in your will alone is my peace.  
I seek that peace.  
I pray in that name which is above every name, even Jesus Christ the Lord.  
Amen.*

## Sunday, November 29: Psalm 33 (1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent) – HOPE

2020 has been a year like any other in anyone's memory. I wonder what 2021 will bring? As we look toward Advent, Christmas, and a New Year, in whom do we put our hope? Who do we trust?

Paul, in Romans, has focussed on Jesus as the essential centre of our lives. He is the One in whom we put our absolute trust. He is the only One in whom we hope. Paul began Romans saying, *"God promised Good News long ago through his prophets in the holy Scriptures. The Good News is about his Son. In his earthly life he was born into King David's family line, and he was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Romans 1:2-4).

Yesterday we read Paul's final words to the Roman Christians: *"Now all glory to God, who is able to make you strong, just as my Good News says. This message about Jesus Christ has revealed his plan for you Gentiles, a plan kept secret from the beginning of time. But now as the prophets foretold and as the eternal God has commanded, this message is made known to all Gentiles everywhere, so that they too might believe and obey him. All glory to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, forever. Amen."*

Psalm 33 reminds us, too, that we need to put our faith and trust in God.

We do live in challenging, uncertain times. The future is one big question mark. But we are not people without hope. *"We put our hope in the Lord. He is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name"* (Psalm 33:20-21).

- As you read through Psalm 33, what encouragement do you receive (read it through a couple of times).
- What hope is there in this Psalm?

As we begin Advent and think about celebrating the birth of Jesus – and as we reflect on all we learned through our study of Romans – how is the Good News about Jesus hope for ourselves? For our world?

We know that 2021 will be another year through which the God of hope will be with us. We know it will be another year in which His good News will change lives. We know 2021 will be another year in which He can make us strong. We know it will be another year when God will be our help and shield. We know 2021 will be another year of His unfailing love. We know it will be another year of hope ...

*"Let your unfailing love surround us, Lord, for our hope is in you alone"* (33:22). Pray that God would give us all a renewed vision of Jesus this Advent season. Pray that we might know His unfailing love. Pray that we might truly have hope, in Him.

*Lord, thank you that you know what it means to be human;  
you understand and sympathize with my life.  
You walked upon this earth and have not forgotten what it is to be tired,  
what it is to know aching muscles, as you worked long hours at the carpenter's bench.  
You have not forgotten what it is like to feel the sharp stabs of pain, or hunger, or thirst.  
You know what it is to be forgotten, to be lonely.  
You remember the feel of hot tears running down your cheeks.  
I thank you that you were willing to come to earth and share the weaknesses of the flesh,  
for now I know that you understand all the things I am called upon to bear.  
I know that you, my God, are still able to do more than I ask or expect.  
I pray that you would bless me, not according to what I deserve,  
but according to the riches in glory of Jesus, my lord.  
Amen.*