

Monday, January 11, 2025

Romans 1:16

As you enter your time with God today, take a moment to quiet your mind from thoughts of life and this world. Breathe this prayer: "Come, Lord Jesus, come. Fill me with your Spirit. Open my heart that you might share your words of life with me today. I long to be more like you."

We read today from Romans 1:16. Read the passage now or at the end of this devotion. What can we learn today about the offer of salvation to all?

What does it take to get rivals to the same table? In many situations it has been almost impossible.

We might think of rivalries around sport. Boston Red Sox and the New York Yankees. Duke vs. North Carolina on the basketball court. The University of Michigan vs. Ohio State on the gridiron. Those rivalries have been and remain heated. Folks draw lines and do not cross them (the U of M vs. Ohio State takes that more literally than most). Families are divided and marriages have ended over these rivalries. That's crazy!

Of course, rivalries go much deeper than that. All we need to say today is "Gaza". The civil war of Nigeria. Ukraine and Russia have been fighting for over a decade with the escalation going since 2022. Thailand and Cambodia do not like each other very much. China and Taiwan seem to be an explosive with a very long fuse.

Historically, we've seen this for centuries. The Catholics of Ireland vs. England. The English vs. the Boers. The English vs. India. The English vs. The French. The English vs. the US. Frankly, it seems like at some point in history England has been at war with everyone!

Now imagine how difficult it would be to bring some of these rivals to the same table to eat a meal together. Certainly, the geo-political conflicts named show how difficult that is. Some of these conflicts have gone on for decades with thousands, even hundreds of thousands of lives lost! To bring some of these people into the same room could easily break out into bloodshed.

But even some of the facetious sports rivalries coach little love between the factions. There are people who will not travel through either Michigan or Ohio (depending on what team you cheer for) and will not even say the name of the other school. It's mind-boggling just how deep our rivalries and divisions run!

And then our text reminds us of the power of the gospel to do what even the best peacemaking processes can never seem to do; bring people who live in great division with one another onto common ground.

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.*

It is important to note that Paul writing such words the church of his day was counter-cultural for many of those who were listening. For centuries, those raised in Jewish homes knew separation from everyone else. Books of the law were repeated time and again and cautioned against becoming unclean. Uncleanliness meant that you were 'out' until you could be cleansed to get back 'in'. It meant that you couldn't worship in the temple, gather in the synagogues, even be with those in your family. One of the

strongest indictments against Jesus by the Pharisees and teachers of the Law is that he sat with ‘sinners, prostitutes, and tax-collectors’. He sat and ate meals with those who were unclean.

He sat with Gentiles.

So Paul’s words would be affront to lifetimes of learning. “Jesus not only wants me to believe, but he wants “*them*” to believe too. So what? Now we are all just one big happy family?”

Yes, we are a family. The grace of Christ offered first to the Jew and then to all is that which transforms them everyone into family members when we believe. That shopkeeper that you’ve ignored is now included. That soldier who has made life miserable is now part of the church. That neighbor whom you’ve argued with is now your brother. Your rival is your sister. Together, we are all God’s family.

That’s world changing. That’s vision altering. At its very core, the gospel is the means to bring peace to all conflict and division in our world. Christ through his grace, brings all those who believe to a shared space where being his child is the common ground. No one has power in the space of grace except Jesus. No one can flex their political, military, or corporate muscles in that space because all our human effort is dust without Christ.

The gospel is offered to the world. When it is received and its transformation is welcomed by those who believe, it has the power to bring unity despite our divisions, common ground despite our disagreement, and peace where there once was hatred and conflict.

May the power of the gospel bring peace to our world.

*May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord turn his smile towards you and give you his peace.*

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I love you all. Blessings.

Feel free to share this devotion with others.

Some questions out of today’s text and teaching.

How does the grace of Christ challenge you to see others that you are ‘divided from’ differently? How can our prayers for peace in our world be shaped by our understanding of the power of grace?

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