

“All-Inclusive Grace”
Broken — Good News for Tough Times: Part 4 of 6

a sermon based on
Romans 10:1-5

and delivered on-
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9th Sunday after Pentecost (Year A)

at
Cherry Valley United Methodist Church

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I don't know how much this will have to do with the sermon, but I came across this story in my preparation and it is just too good not to share:

A mother was preparing pancakes for her young sons, Kevin and Ryan. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Seeing an opportunity for a moral lesson, the mother said, "If Jesus were sitting here, he would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake. I can wait.'"

Kevin, the older of the two, didn't miss a beat. He turned to his younger brother and said, "Ryan, you be Jesus!"¹

That's a little backwards from our usual experience of the Gospel lesson, which in another feeding miracle includes a young boy with two fish to share.

But let's turn to the epistle reading – Romans 9:1-5 that Keith read earlier.

We're continuing this sermon series – about how we find good news – not just any good news, but THE Good News – when things are tough. We've talked about the body-spirit connection and the recognition that we need to properly identify what is hurting to find healing, we've considered how hope can help us to discover God's promise as we push through pain and lean on him for strength and comfort. Last week – we followed up on how God makes himself present in all circumstances – or “brokenness” - for our needs. But what about those needs – those worries – those pains that we have outside of us? It's that sort of conflict – turmoil – worry – that Paul is talking about in the passage we have from Romans, today.

Something is weighing on him. Listen again to verses one and two:

“I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit—²I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.” (Ro. 9:1-2)

Did you hear how emphatic he was? Three times he points out how “true” his concern is! He invokes Christ and the Holy Spirit! The thing that is so true is a “great sorrow” – an “unceasing anguish”

It seems like shift from the passage before when he proclaims with confidence that nothing can separate those who claim Jesus Christ - from the love of God. But it's really not. He believes that those who are in Christ are secure in God's love. But... there's something else weighing on him.

Paul – a Pharisee – a committed Jew (We need to remember that Jesus was a Jew – and that Christianity began as a Jewish sect.) He's worried about those Jews who had not claimed the promise of Jesus Christ – God's Messiah, delivered through them. He's worried that they will be comfortable in their “place” as God's chosen people instead of claiming God's promise. He's worried about their salvation! It's tearing him apart.

Paul is writing to a predominately Gentile group of Christians in Rome. His fear is that they might get so caught up in their own justification through Jesus Christ – that they might forget that God loves the Jews, too – and that he chose them first.

Then he says this in verse 3: “For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh.” That is he's saying, “If

¹http://www.homileticonline.com/subscriber/illustration_search.asp?keywords=pancakes&Search=7&imageField.x=0&imageField.y=0

giving up my own salvation would assure them of salvation – I'd do it." But he knows he can't. Jesus' condemnation and death, may take away our condemnation and the sting of death, but Paul's sacrifice can't, even if his older brother is there saying, "You be Jesus."

But that longing speaks to something. Think of all those men and women of the Bible whom we call heroes: David, Deborah, Noah, Rahab (the Canaanite prostitute and Jesus' great-great twenty-four times great [if I counted correctly]) grandmother, Peter (who even though he never knew what to say, walked on water – if ever so briefly) Mary (the virgin willing to risk scandal to give birth to our savior), the Canaanite woman who argued with Jesus in order to get a blessing for her daughter. In each of them we hear stories about men and women who did the right thing even when it was hard, because they loved the Lord – and they trusted him. In doing so – they blessed others. But it all started with a longing: a longing to serve God and an understanding that God loved them.

Paul knew that God loves the Jewish people. Scripture told him so. He'd experienced it. He knew the heroes. He knew about their hearts, their courage, their wisdom, their hope, and the power that God worked out through them. But he worried that some didn't fully appreciate the fullness of God's promise for them.

In our own context as United Methodists, we remember that the "new" thing Methodists were doing in the eighteenth century didn't take God's love away from the Church of England any more than the Reformers claims did for Roman Catholics, or the Great Schism did for the Orthodox Church. DO you see where I'm going? How far can we take it?

Obviously, as Paul reminds us, we know that Christianity did not displace God's grace for the Jewish people. If God is faithful to his promises (I believe he is), then even the descendants of Ishmael, a son of Abraham, has a part in God's grace. In fact, Genesis 26:4 reminds us that even in the beginning of God's covenant that he told Abraham:

"I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and will give to your offspring all these lands; and all the nations of the earth shall gain blessing for themselves through your offspring,"

God's love extends to every single human being. God's grace is for all. For the most pious saint, and for the most inglorious rascal. When I hear those stories of rascals – who call out for God's mercy and blessing – whether in the midst of trouble or at the moment of death – it is a reminder that God never gives up on any of us – or any of them.

And so we're left with two reminders: First – God loves you and hasn't given up on you no matter how much you think you may deserve it. Second – God loves those whom you love – and even those whom you may not like – and invites you to claim his grace not only for yourself but to go after his promise of grace for them by doing good and seeking peace with others. So that we may not forget any soul whom God loves and know that his grace – his blessing – extends through you when you claim the bond that Jesus offered on the cross. AMEN.