

(PP1) Becoming human- giving glory x 23 Sunday 10 June_2018.

Background text READ **ROMANS 16: 1 - 16. OUT OF MANY, ONE.**

This year we are exploring what it means to be truly, fully human. Also, I pray that we will seek individually and together in community (*) to bring greater glory to God by the way we live our lives in relationship to others and with God. (Chapters 1 – 11 God’s mercy to us through Jesus. Simply amazing – respond with giving glory to God)

(PP2) Transformation through relating in Community (*) . This talk will hopefully make us consider how we relate to others within and outside the church community. **In Rome: *the church was probably a network of house congregations, rather than a single church meeting in one building.* (David Coffey) *Church buildings were not widely in use until the 4th century and rarely used in the third century.*** Hospitality and the welcome of stranger was essential to church life and growth. Some have suggested they can identify as least 5 house congregations mentioned in Romans 16.

The household congregations of: -

- 1) *Priscilla and Aquila (VV3-5). A relatively wealthy home, racially mixed and friends with Paul.*
- 2) *Aristobulus (v10) Upwardly mobile Jews and Greeks and Administrators by profession.*
- 3) *Narcissus (v11) Greek slaves with Roman sympathies, possibly unfriendly to Jews.*
- 4) *Asyncritus and friends (v14) low social status and located in a poor part of Rome.*
- 5) *Philologus and friends (v15) a poor underclass group with Jewish sympathies and women included in the leadership team.*

(Question: how did you view the church at Rome? A vast building, dripping with gold and art works? This was NOT the church in Rome!)

Paul argues that the transformation of mind and behaviour that we need comes about as we make our personal sacrificial and living offering to God (Romans 12: 1, 2) and as we help and encourage one another in the community of God’s people to do this.

12 v2 We are not simply to conform to the practices and prejudices of this present age – whether they manifest themselves in the world or in the church. We are to resist the outward pressures to conform (SUSCHEMATIZO – to be squeezed into a mould by the world) – instead we must seek to become what God wants us to be. Let God shape the way we think and relate and organize ourselves.

Within this is surely the understanding that human identity, purpose, meaning and satisfaction are **discovered in personal relationship with God BUT ALSO AS WE ARE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS**. The priority therefore is the community and the *common good* rather than me and my interests. We need in the churches to work at getting on even if we do not agree on everything.

(PP3) The clear message of Jesus in the letter of Paul to the Romans is that we need one another. He wrote to them from Corinth (AD 57/58) and called them **God's Beloved – called to be God's own people (Romans 1: 7)**. He clearly appreciated them even though he'd never been to Rome he'd met many of them e.g. like Priscilla and Aquila in his travels and through his business interests of tentmaking. He himself as he writes to them v23 is based in the home of Gaius in Corinth where another house congregation meets.

Roman church congregations - **A MOVING MOSAIC OF PEOPLE**. *Out of the many, one*. Motto of the United States of America – 1776 became the national motto when the many federal states formed one nation – ***E pluribus unum***.

The HOUSEHOLDS of the day were often more extended than our own limited families of today. Paul writes to married people, to single people, to slaves and leaders – all of whom related through the household and the Christian congregations that met in some of the larger houses. Their comings and goings would have been observed daily by the people of their neighbourhood – both Jews and Gentiles (*plesion* – that we spoke of last week). The church needed places to meet, worship and eat in but generally at this stage large houses were adequate. (Chapel buildings: helpful/ unhelpful in mission? Are we limited or bound by them or do they enable us?)

Unity was essential to the mission of sharing the Good News of Jesus and Paul warns his friends in Rome against those who are disruptive of that unity and he tells them – *Keep away from those who serve their own appetites*. He encourages them to be discerning and to stay loyal to the Gospel. (READ vv 17-20). **Paul knows that friendship and working together are the means by which we are sustained, and others also come to faith in Jesus**. These relationships (alongside our inner relationship with God) are given to us by the Holy Spirit of God for us to thrive and the church to grow.

We are called to be part of a people...the people of God. We are called into community---this is the life Jesus wants for his people. (The Godhead is community, humans are community – body, soul and spirit- and we need to be in community to thrive and grow.)

I think Paul wrote to the different household congregations in Rome to encourage fellowship and recognition of one another (and the letter would have been circulated between and amongst them). Paul had encountered many people as he travelled, and he knew what they had in common and he encourages them to **develop deep relationships of friendship and co-working and even tells them to**

greet one another with fondness with the greeting of a *holy kiss* (v16).

Furthermore, he extends their global understanding of God's people by saying, *all the churches of Christ – greet you.*

(PP4) Paul in this short passage mentions 26 Christians and names 24 of them. More than a third of those mentioned are women (which is notable given the domination of public life by men. These women obviously do not just function in the domestic sphere. The names alone tell us a lot – there is predominantly a Gentile membership but also notable Jews. The majority are not influential but slaves or freed men and women from the lower strata of Roman society but presumably a few owners of larger homes.

FRIENDSHIP MATTER TO PAUL AND IT MATTERED AS FAR AS THE SPREAD OF THE MESSAGE WENT – Paul's friends were also to a greater or lesser extent also those he worked with in spreading the message of Jesus. He names 3 who are "dear friends" Epenetus (v5), Stachys (v9) and Persis (v12) and Empliatius (v8) who he "loves in the Lord" and Rufus' mother who has been like a mother to him (V13).

The friendship and ministry of women mattered to Paul. This is important to say because many have accused Paul of being a misogynist and hating women. Amongst all the diversity of Believers **9 gifted women** are spoken of. (For info not spoke out).

Phoebe – vv1,2 a wealthy women and deacon in the church of Cenchræe (the port that served Corinth). Paul probably met her on a business trip and she was a benefactor or helper to Paul and others and she may well have carried his letter to Rome. From her name we know she is a Gentile.

Priscilla vv3,4 and other NT refs. - Usually mentioned before her husband Aquila and she and her husband were tentmakers like Paul. She was either converted before her husband, a titled woman or had a more prominent teaching role than Aquila. They were comparatively well off and mentored young missionaries (*Acts 18:26-28*) and they risked their lives for Paul.

Junia or Junias. Should probably be translated Junia (female) – possibly wife of Andronicus and both well known as Apostles – travelling missionaries.

Mary (v6), Tryphena and Tryphosa (v12) all commended for their hard work in the Lord's Name, as is his friend **Persis (v12)**. The unnamed are Rufus' mother and the sister of Nereus. **Julia** is mentioned too and in Rome we see that the Jesus Gospel principle of equality is in action. (Only later was there a serious relapse into clamping down on women).

VAREITY of Believers is apparent – seen from the different names and descriptions that Paul has a very diverse group of friends and fellow workers – some of whom who work very hard. There are influential names and also the names of slaves e.g. *Phlegon* – a name also given to dogs. **How they relate in the Gospel. They relate as: -**

- *In Christ* (vv3,7,9,& 10)

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- *In the Lord (vv8,11,12 & 13)*
- *Sister/ brothers/ mother (vv1,13,14 See Mark 3: 35 Whoever does what God wants him to do is my brother, my sister, my mother).*
- *Fellow or co-worker (vv3&9)*
- *Saints (vv2 & 15).*

The Holy Spirit can blend our cultural diversity into creative relationship. (David Coffey). I would add – if we co-operate and are committed to this.

To live in community is always a challenge to us. It was in Paul's day in Rome and it is for us. For us in the church we can face conflict as we face difference, but Paul certainly values very greatly the diversity of relationships that following Jesus and being part of the church has brought. I certainly value it greatly and I think that the message of Jesus makes this uniting and working together possible. It is the hope for the nations – that out of many Jesus has made ONE PEOPLE. Jesus prays for us to be one as he and the Father and Spirit are one. This oneness is part of becoming human and bringing glory.

CONCLUDING:

Paul seems to appreciate, value and see the need of WORK for the Lord, HOSPITALITY and welcome of stranger, FRIENDSHIP and even “new” FAMILY from amongst those who do what pleases God. He recognizes that courage is needed for this (vv4,7,10). How much do Christians currently value these things and is the work of God suffering because we don't value them enough?

Paul has experienced the kindness, help and humanity of many who are now in Rome.

He takes time to express his appreciation and gratitude and we too need to express to this to those in our churches who offer friendship, welcome and work with us. In God's work of sharing the Good News with others they are our friends, our *brothers, our sisters and our mothers.*

Paul concludes (READ vv 25 – 27) by giving glory to God (doxology) and pronouncing blessings.

God can enable us to stand firm.

This message is to be made known to *all nations so that they may believe and obey.*

TO THE ONLY GOD, WHO ALONE IS ALL WISE, BE GLORY THROUGH JESUS CHRIST FOR EVER! AMEN.