Greeted By Name

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Preacher: Martin Shadwick

[0:00] I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Synchria, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and help her in whatever she may need from you.

For she's been a patron of many, and of myself as well. Greet Prisca and Achilla, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well.
Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Eponetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you.
Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They're well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.
Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys.
[1:14] Greet Apellas, who's approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. Greet my kinsmen, Herodian.

Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who's worked hard in the Lord.
Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord. Also his mother, who's been a mother to me as well. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Petrobus, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them.
Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympus, and all the saints who are with them.
Greet one another with a holy kiss.
All of the churches of Christ greet you. I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you've been taught.
[2:30] Avoid them. Avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the hearts of the naive.

For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you. But I want you to be wise as to what's good and innocent as to what's evil.
The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you.
So do Lucius and Jason, and so do Cipater, my kinsmen. I, Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.
Gaius, who's host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Cortus, greet you. Now, to him who's able to strengthen you, according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages, but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings, has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith.
[3:59] To the only wise God be glory forevermore, through Jesus Christ. Amen. Good morning, everyone.

For the benefit of any who may not know me, my name's Martin, and I'm one of the pastors here at church. Isn't it wonderful that God gives us all in different ways? There are probably a number who are on the Bible reading roster who are glad that you didn't get drawn to do the reading today.
So thanks, Catherine, for the reading. And I've got to say, there might be some who are on the kids talk roster who are glad you didn't. But thanks, Jen, for the kids talk.
Isn't it wonderful to have so many kids in our midst? Well, Paul says in Romans chapter 15, verse 4, that whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope.

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Thank you. Paul was speaking about the scriptures, the Old Testament scriptures, specifically, but the New Testament scriptures are equally the word of God.
[5:27] And so I think it's reasonable to conclude that the books of the New Testament have the same essential character and purpose, which means that Romans 16, in the providence of God, was written for our instruction, that through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope.

And that includes the long list of greetings in Romans 16, verses 3 to 16, written for our instruction. But what on earth are we to do with it? I don't know anyone called Eponetus or Ampliatus or Philologus, so I can hardly be expected to greet them. I do know a few Marys and a few Julias, but that doesn't really help because clearly they're not the same Mary or the same Julia that Paul's talking about.
So what does this long list of greetings mean for us? Well, I think there's a general rule of thumb when it comes to reading the Bible, and that is that what the Bible means for us today should be a natural extension of what it meant for the first readers.
So the question we need to ask is, what did these greetings mean for the Roman believers who first received them? Now, I've been tasked with bringing our series on Romans to a close and initially set out to think I'd preach through the entire chapter, but really I'm going to focus our attention on verses 3 to 16.
[6:56] I'll say a few things about the later verses towards the end of my talk. So I don't know whether I'm bringing the whole book of Romans to a close, but we'll focus our thoughts on these greetings, things particularly. What are we to do with them?

Well, one thing that's going to help us answer that question is to compare Romans 16 with other endings of Paul's letters. Paul wrote 13 letters in the New Testament. How does Romans 16 compare with his other letters? Now, each week here at church, either Dave or I will send out a reminder email to people who are serving at church on the Sunday, and I have a confession to make.
Whenever I do that, I just copy and paste an earlier email, and then I change the names. And then I'll change, you know, I'll put a different Bible verse at the front, but essentially I'm just sending the same email every time with different people's names attached.
And always in the same order, and it's the same format. The endings of Paul's letters are a little bit like that too. There are more varied than that, but there are some similarities.
There are common elements that crop up again and again. Think of it like baking. If each of Paul's 13 letters is a different recipe, there's a collection of ingredients in the pantry, and no single recipe uses all the ingredients, but all the ingredients get used, you know, multiple times in different recipes.
[8:25] And the other thing you notice in Paul's endings of his letters is that he'll tend to add the ingredients in the same order. So the, you know, the flour first, then the sugar, then the milk, then the eggs, or whatever the order is, right?

The same, it tends to follow the same order. Now, there are a few reasons, though, that Romans 16 in particular is distinctive. It's the lengthiest and most complex ending of any of Paul's letters.
It has the most ingredients, and often those ingredients are included in greater quantity than elsewhere. Sorry to keep pushing that metaphor, but particularly that greeting section where he's greeting individual people by name, that is much longer than anywhere, than any equivalent.
In fact, he doesn't often do that. He does send greetings, but greeting particular people by name, he only does that occasionally, and I hear it's far and away the longest of any of his letters.
Romans is the only letter to end with a doxology in verse 25 to 27. Normally, Paul ends his letters with basically a form of the same kind of sentence, which is what we find in the second half of verse 20, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ will be with you.
[9:42] That's how Paul tends to sign off his letters. Well, here we've got that in verse 20, and then it's as if Timothy and a few others said, oh, hang on, make sure you send greetings from me.

So Paul added those in, and then he thought, well, I can hardly finish it with, quartus greets you, so maybe that's how the doxology came about. I don't know. I mean, this is speculation, right? But what I'm saying is, it's a more complicated ending to a book than usual for Paul, and especially the length, the amount of time he devotes to these greetings.

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So why did Paul do it? Well, I think one likely reason Paul wrote the long list of greetings in verse 3 to 16 is because he was seeking to strengthen his connection with the Christian community in Rome as a whole.
Remember, he didn't plant the church there. He hadn't been there. He hadn't visited them in person. He was intending to visit, and when he came, he wanted them to assist him in a planned mission trip to Spain.
And so one of the reasons Paul wrote Romans was to strengthen his ties with the church or with the believing community there. It's a bit like if you meet someone from another church and you work out which church they're from, it's quite possible that early on in that conversation, there'll be an exchange that goes something like, oh, do you know Fred and Jill?
[11:04] We used to do beach mission together. And then they say, oh, yeah, we know Fred and Jill. And that mutual connection with someone who is loved and trusted and known, that's a bridge that helps you build your relationship in the early stages with this person you've just met.

That might be one of the reasons for these lengthy greetings, but I don't really think that's a sufficient explanation. This passage would have impacted its original readers in other, more immediate ways.
And something that's going to help us appreciate this is realising that Romans 16 is actually, it's a fascinating chapter for historians because it reveals quite a lot about the composition of the Christian community in Rome.
It's a very personal part of Paul's letter. There's a lot we don't know about the people Paul names, but there are important things that we can surmise from what Paul says here.
So I want to just point out three things about the church in Rome that we can kind of glean from this chapter and with those in mind, how these greetings may have been received by the believers in Rome.
[12:22] First, these verses reveal that Paul was writing to a mixed community. Mixed in a couple of senses. It was ethnically mixed.

It included both Jews and Gentiles. It seems like predominantly Gentiles. I think I've got a table that, Sean, you might be able to bring up here, which is, I don't know if the font's too small.
I mean, the details don't really matter. I'm just trying to paint some broad brushstrokes here. But there are at least four, maybe five, possibly a few more Jews there. You have Prisca and Aquila. We know from Acts chapter 18 that Aquila is a Jew from Pontus. There are three whom Paul specifically calls his kinsmen, Andronicus and Junia in verse 7, and then Herodian in verse 11. And the fact that Paul singles out and identifies them as his kinsmen suggests that the majority of the others, whom he doesn't designate that way, are not Jewish. They're Gentile believers.
[13:26] So we've got maybe four or five Jews and 21 or 22 Gentiles. The numbers might not be precise, but that's roughly how it breaks out. So it's a mixed community in that sense of including both Jew and Gentile.

It's also mixed in that it includes both women and men. I mean, that's hardly surprising. Almost every church will. Among those poor names, there are nine women and 16 men.
There's a general movement, as Paul greets individuals by name, from those he knows very well, like Prisca and Aquila, whom he'd spent significant time with serving in ministry together with them. But moving from those who are better known to Paul to those he may only kind of know about rather than know personally. I don't think we can't press that too far.
When we get down to verse 13, he talks about Rufus and Rufus's mother, and he seems like he knows them quite well. But beyond that general movement, I think you can say there's no discernible ordering or hierarchy in how Paul lists people.
[14:34] He just, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, people of different backgrounds and different social standing, all freely jumbled together in Paul's greetings.

And by greeting people so liberally, so expansively, Paul is in a sense demonstrating to this mixed community that everyone has a place, whoever you are.
It's as Paul had said in Romans 12 verse 5, we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. And not just does everyone have a place in this mixed community, but everyone's contribution to the community matters.
As Paul had gone on to teach in Romans 12 about different parts of the body having different gifts according to the grace given to us, so in his greetings, Paul takes pleasure in commending people

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when he knew enough to do so.
So in verse 4, he says of Prisca and Aquila, they risked their necks for my life. In verse 6, he says of Mary, greet Mary who worked hard for you.
[15:50] Paul doesn't tell us what work Mary did. Presumably it was known to the Romans since it was on their behalf. Verse 9, read Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ.

Verse 12, triphana and triphosa, those workers in the Lord. Verse 13, speaking of Rufus' mother, he says, that she had been a mother to me as well.
That is, she'd probably shown Paul hospitality in the past. So we have here people who had been involved in evangelism and in ministry and in serving the church and in hospitality in different ways that Paul's able to name and identify and commend.
Now just as an aside, Paul specifically commends twice as many women as men for their work. I think the next slide shows that. There are seven women whom he names of the nine in total whom he commends for their work, their ministry in the church and only three men.
I don't think we should press that too far but clearly we can see from this that women made a massive contribution in the early church in terms of their service and ministry. And Paul loved to recognise and acknowledge the fruit of God's grace in the lives of others.
[17:15] He loved to see God's grace working and working out in the good deeds and the service and the love and the hospitality of others and to commend that, to draw attention to it.

Now, personally, I've got to say, I don't think I'm very good at this, this kind of thing. I think it's partly Australian culture.
We're much better at tearing one another down than building one another up. It's partly my own personality. Like I, in terms of my own personality, I just tend to, like when something's done, I just go on to the next thing.
I rarely kind of pause to reflect and be grateful and give thanks and celebrate what God's done. I'm trying to get better at it.
Writing this talk, I paused and wrote down the names of two people I've been intending to write to for an entire year but never done it, right?
[18:13] And so, they're now written on, those names are written on a piece of paper on my desk and someone can check with me next week, keep me accountable and say, did you write to those two people? To thank them for the work they did.

So, I'm not very good at it but when I do pause and take breath and consider the good work of others, it is a joy, isn't it? It is a joy to recognise the fruit of God's grace in the lives of other believers and in fact, when we fail to do that, we're missing an opportunity to acknowledge the grace of God because it is only God's grace operating in any of us that produces good things.
Not only is it good for each of us to recognise and celebrate God's grace in the lives of others, it's good for them to hear us do it. Don't save all your kindest words for the eulogy.
Now, yes, of course, we must not in ourselves be working in order to seek the praise of men.
I mean, Jesus, we know Jesus' warnings about that. Truly, I say to you, they've received their reward in full. We don't do good in order to be praised by people.
[19:38] But Jesus was speaking about our motive for doing good. He was critiquing hypocrisy. He wasn't issuing a blanket prohibition on ever thanking or expressing appreciation for someone else.

Children need the praise of their parents. And to be honest, we never really outgrow that. Genuine appreciation of one another, sincerely expressed, is a refreshing breeze for the soul.
We're humans, not robots. We're personal beings, not machines. And it's easy to grow discouraged when we don't feel appreciated. But to this mixed community, Paul was liberal in his greetings and liberal in his praise.
Everyone has a place and everyone's contribution matters. Romans 16 also suggests that not only was this Christian community in Rome mixed, it was also marginal.
There's a couple of factors that support that conclusion. First, there are indications that a significant number of the believers in Rome were immigrants.
[21:02] So, for example, verse 5, greets Eponetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. I mean, that's exciting, the first convert to Christ in Asia.

But he's in Rome. But really, he's someone from Asia, from modern-day Turkey. Verses 3 and 4, we've got Prisker and Aquila.

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We know a decent amount about them because they appear in Acts, the Book of Acts. Aquila was born in Pontus, so that's on the southern shore of the Black Sea, so northern modern-day Turkey. At some point, he'd moved to Rome. Whether he met Prisker, or Priscilla, his wife, before or after he moved to Rome, we don't know. But in around AD 49, he and his wife were forced to leave Rome when the Emperor Claudius expelled Jews from Rome.
He engaged in ministry with Paul, and he, or the couple, Priscilla and Aquila, engaged in ministry with Paul in Corinth and in Ephesus. Then they returned to Rome after Claudius' death. The fact that they can host a church in their home suggests they were reasonably wealthy, but clearly not established enough that it could protect them from expulsion less than 10 years earlier.
[22:15] We've got verse 7, Andronicus and Junia. We're told they are well known to the apostles and they were in Christ before me. So they are early converts to Christ who became believers before Paul.

So very likely not from Rome, but they'd moved to Rome. Verse 13, again, Rufus' mother had shown Paul hospitality, which must have been somewhere other than Rome. There's also the fact that Paul is writing to them in Greek, not in Latin.
And in fact, Greek continued to be the primary language of the church in the Rome well into the second century. And many of the names are Greek.
So the indications here are that the Christian community in Rome at this time was largely an immigrant population, or at least a significant proportion of it.
And it's generally true that newcomers to a city are more marginal in that city. They have less influence, less property, less wealth, less power in that place.
[23:23] But beyond that, there's a second factor, and that is that there are hints or indications or suggestions, it's likely that a high proportion of those Paul names were slaves or former slaves, freedmen, freedwomen.

So they'd been born as slaves and had since been freed. Now, how do we know that? We know that from naming conventions. people born as slaves would be given a single name by their masters, and there were some names that were just more commonly given than others.
Greek names were common to be given to slaves. There were popular names like Hermes. Slaves would be named after their place of origin, which might account for the name Persis in verse 12, for a slave who was from Persia.
Slaves could be named according to the family they served, which is a possible explanation for the names Mary or Maria, Julia and Herodian. So, I mean, I'm getting most of this data from an article written by a scholar called Peter Lamp, the Roman Christians of Romans 16.
You can find it online if you're interested. Ask me about it later if you don't remember that. But the indications from the names, just the names alone we see in Romans 16, here's how he breaks it up.
[24:39] We've got four that are likely freeborn, ten that are likely slave born, and twelve where it's kind of hard to tell. But beyond that, in verse 10 and verse 11, look at how Paul greets people in those verses.

Verse 10, second half, he says, greet those who belong to the family or to the household of Aristobulus. Now, presumably, Aristobulus is the head of the household and is not himself a Christian, or Paul would have greeted Aristobulus as well.
But he says, greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus, likely some of his slaves and freedmen. Likewise, in verse 11, greet those in the Lord who belong to the household of Narcissus.
So, I mean, certainty and precision isn't possible, but probably, looking at the data here in terms of the names, at least two thirds of the Christian population in Rome were slaves or freedmen and freedwomen.
That is, they'd been born into slavery. They likely lived with, it's likely that the majority of believers in Rome lived in the poorer, crowded sectors of Rome, where people were crammed together in apartment blocks, where most immigrants lived.
[26:04] So, this community was, in some sense, in the city, marginal. It wasn't at the centre of civic life in Rome. They were poorer people, part of the masses.

Their names would not be spoken in the imperial palace, nor enrolled in the list of senators of Rome. No monuments would be erected in their honour on the Capitoline Hill.
They lived in obscurity, obscurity, they died in obscurity, as part of the mass of the underclasses in the capital of the Roman Empire. Indeed, when they were noticed, it was with scorn.

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Roman historian Tacitus called the Christians in Rome a class hated for their abominations. And Tacitus describes how seven or eight years after Paul wrote this letter, the Emperor Nero fixed the blame for a fire in Rome on the Christians.
In an attempt to, people were saying Nero started it, and Nero was trying to shift the blame somewhere else, so he fixed it on the Christians, made them convenient scapecoats, no one shed a tear because they didn't care about the Christians, and soon Nero was just arresting and killing Christians just because they were Christians.
[27:26] Here's what Tacitus says, mockery of every sort was added to their deaths, covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burned to serve as a nightly illumination when daylight had expired.

Now that lay ahead, less than ten years in the future, not unknown at this stage to Paul and his recipients, but it illustrates the vulnerability and the powerlessness of the Christian community in Rome.
They were economically and socially marginal. To this marginal community despised in the world, Paul's greetings say, you are known and you are loved.
It would have been much more economical for Paul to issue a general greeting, greet all the saints in Rome, greet everyone who belongs to Christ, something like that, people.
But instead, Paul brought to mind individuals, remembered them, acknowledged them, greeted them by name. Greet my beloved Eponetus, greet Mary, greet Andronicus and Junia, greet Ampliatus, greet Urbanus and so on.
[28:47] He greeted them by name. As many as he could remember, Dale Carnegie in his well-known book, How to Win Friends and Influence People, has a chapter devoted to this principle.

Remember that a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language. Saying if you want to have friends, then learn how to remember their names.
because people love to hear their name. Because the fact is that for all of us, for every single one of us, there is a longing to be known.
We want to be known. It's painful, and no doubt you've experienced this at some time in your life, it's painful when you are ignored or forgotten or left out.
Even just to hear their names read out in Paul's epistle would say to these believers, you are known. You are known.
[29:57] But beyond that, consider the designations Paul scatters amongst his greetings. So initially Paul speaks of his own affection. Verse 5, my beloved Eponetus. Verse 8, Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.

Verse 9, my beloved Stachys. Then that spills over into absolute terms, talking about maybe not so much Paul's affection for them, or that's certainly there in the background, but their status in the eyes of God.
Verse 10, greet a Pelus who is approved in Christ. Verse 12, greet the beloved Persis, who has, greet the beloved Persis.
Verse 13, greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord. Despised by men, but approved in Christ.
Hated by the Emperor, but loved by God. Forgotten in the world, but chosen in the Lord. Now, if Paul were writing to Grace Evangelical Church today, he would no doubt say similar things to us.
[31:12] Because this is the heart of God. This is how God sees us. Isaiah 43, verse 1, but now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel, fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine.

Or Revelation 3, verse 5, Jesus says, Revelation 3, verse 5, the one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life.
I will confess his name before my father and before his angels. Christ saves us, Christ has redeemed us to be part of a great people, a great multitude, but not in such a way that you individually disappear into the mass of the great unwashed.
No, you, you yourself are known by name, clothed in white, loved and honoured by God.
And you will hear your saviour say your name. For those marginal in the world are precious and esteemed in the sight of God.
[32:46] To this marginal community, Paul's greeting says, you are known and you are loved. God is a third thing the greetings in Romans 16 reveal about the Christian community in the city and that is that it was fragmented.

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Now what do you picture when Paul's letter arrived in Rome? Phoebe, it seems, mentioned in verses 1 and 2 from the vicinity of Corinth, she seems like she's delivering it. What do you picture taking place there?
Phoebe brings the letter. Do you picture a large crowd gathered like this in one place in an auditorium? Listening as the letter was read out? Well that wasn't the reality in Rome.
The greetings in Romans 16 indicate that the Christian community there was dispersed into several different clusters and groupings. It's hard to know exactly how many, but if we go to the next table, thanks.
Oh yeah, there we go, thanks Sean. In verse 5 there's mention of the church in the house of Prisca and Aquila. Now so their house is probably a Roman villa so it might have an atrium like a hall, a foyer sort of hall area that could accommodate maybe 20 to 50 people depending on how large it was.
[34:02] So you've got a house church in that sort of traditional house church model. Interestingly that verse, Romans 16 verse 5, is the only time the word church is used of the Roman Christian community in the letter of Romans.

Christians because they weren't a single church, a single gathering, the word church means gathering, there was one gathering in Prisca and Aquila's house. There are other groups though, verse 10 and 11 as we've seen mentioned those who belong to the family of Aristobulus or the household and those who belong to the household of Narcissus.
In those two groupings the householder himself, the head of the house was not, it seems, a Christian. So where did they meet? Did they just kind of gather where they could, when they could, in those little household groupings, a few slaves, a few servants in each place?
There are two other clusters of believers in verse 14 and 15, look at verse 14 and 15, greet Asyncretus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobus, Hermas and the brothers who are with them.
Then verse 15, greet Philologus, Julian, Nereus and his sister, Olympus and all the saints who are with them. These groups perhaps met in apartment blocks or workshops in the poorer districts of Rome with a capacity of maybe 10 to 15 people.
[35:27] Then there are another 14 mentioned in Paul's greetings who aren't assigned to any identifiable group. We can't be sure how they were connected. Did they link up with some of those other five or so groups?

Were there some other groups and clusters and cell groups that Paul doesn't mention? Some may have been isolated. Whatever the case, we can't press the details but we get the impression that the Christian community in Rome was somewhat fragmented in terms of their gatherings.
to this fragmented community, Paul's greetings say, remember one another.
Remember one another. Now in this chapter, Paul's extending his personal greetings to people he knows in Rome and to others but grammatically he uses second person plural imperatives.
What that means is that they're basically exhortations addressed to everyone. When Paul says greet Prisca and Aquila and the church in their house, he's saying you all greet Prisca and Aquila and the church in their house.
[36:36] You all greet my beloved Eponetus. You all greet Mary who worked hard for you and so on. After all, Paul isn't there himself in person to pass on his greetings.

greetings, he needs the Roman believers to do it for him and he involves them in it. He involves them in greeting one another.
Greet, greet, greet. On and on it goes until we finally reach verse 16. Greet one another with a holy kiss. There's a cultural element here.
Kissing is still today used as a common greeting in the Mediterranean. But at least in the second century, by at least the second century, greeting with a holy kiss was actually incorporated in church liturgy.
People would kiss one another during the church service and say peace be with you. It was an expression of love and unity. Whether or not Paul envisaged it being included in church liturgy, maybe we could bring that in here.
[37:46] But whether or not Paul envisaged that, he wanted the believers in Rome to remember one another and to welcome one another even though they were fragmented into these different groupings.

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Their physical fragmentation and dispersal throughout the city must not be a barrier to the deeper unity and love of the spirit. And so Paul says remember one another, greet one another with a holy kiss.
Let's think this into our context. First question for you to consider. Is there anyone in this gathering here whom you cannot greet with a holy kiss?
That is, is there anyone here whom you cannot warmly embrace or handshake or look in the eye? anyone to whom your body language doesn't communicate, I'm glad you're here, I welcome you, but rather I don't know you.
If that's the case, can I suggest first acknowledge the sadness of that situation? that's not the way God intends it to be.
[39:09] Secondly, consider what might it take to move from avoiding that other person to greeting them with a holy kiss? What would it take? Try and imagine, what would it take?

It may need to start in your heart. What needs to happen in your heart for affection for that other person or other people to grow? Perhaps there are grievances.
Are there grievances? Well, if there are grievances, the Bible kind of gives you two options. Just bear with them, forgive them, overlook them, or address them.
They're both biblical responses depending on the nature of the grievance. But holding onto a grievance, nurturing it, letting it fester, that doesn't build the unity of love that the spirit desires.
So if there are people here you're struggling to greet with a holy kiss, just try and imagine what steps might help you get there to be able to express genuine affection and warmth for that other person.
[40:15] Second question for us as a whole, are we ready to greet one another with a holy kiss in the fragmented Christian community in Newcastle and the Hunter?

What would that mean? Well, that means looking for and rejoicing in faith in Christ wherever we find it, even when it sits alongside disagreement on secondary things.
It matters to God that we can greet with a holy kiss believers from other churches. God's family includes all of its fragmented parts.
grace and everyone who trusts in Christ is my brother or sister. Of course, for Rome, their unity extended far beyond the walls of the city, just as our unity in Christ extends far beyond the New England highway.
Verse 16, look at the end of verse 16. After saying, greet one another with a holy kiss, Paul says, all the churches of Christ greet you.
[41:27] There's a wider family of God, Paul says, all the churches of Christ, which extends its greetings to this mixed, marginal, fragmented community in Rome and to which they were linked.

Now, what do we make of words, Paul's words here in the second half of verse 16? Are they a mere platitude? Is Paul just making that up? I mean, how can Paul say, all the churches of Christ greet you?
No doubt there's some hyperbole, but actually, as Paul, when Paul wrote this letter, as he laboured on this letter in the city of Corinth, with the help of Tertius the scribe, he mentions in verse 22, at that time there were gathered in Corinth representatives from all the regions where Paul had planted churches.
You can read about it in Acts chapter 20 and observe some overlap even with names that are mentioned in this chapter. There was Sopita or Sosipata of Berea, Aristarchus, Secundus and Jason from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, not to be confused with the Gaius in verse 23, who's a Gaius of Corinth.
Timothy, Paul's co-worker from Lystra, Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia. Why had they come to Corinth? They'd come to Corinth as representative of the churches because they were going to assist in safeguarding the collection that Paul was about to escort to Rome for the poor saints in Rome.
[42:58] So when Paul wrote this letter, there were representatives from, in some sense, all the churches. And when Paul says, all the churches greet you, Christ greet you, I don't think he's making up empty words.

I think he's representing the genuine interest and care and affection of those other churches for their brothers and sisters in Rome. The Roman believers were connected to something much, much greater.

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The Roman believers were called the Doxology. Let me just read it out.
Now to him who is able to, verse 25, now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages, but has now been disclosed through the prophetic writings, and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith, to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ.
Amen. What the Roman Christians and the churches of Greece and Macedonia and Asia and the Christians of Newcastle and the Hunter and every place today are connected to is the plan that God is working out throughout all of history into the present time.
[44:32] The revelation of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, the one who died for sins and rose again. The proclamation of Christ to, verse 26, to all nations to bring about the obedience of faith, that is that people may obey the gospel by trusting in Jesus, by coming to believe in him.

That's God's great plan. That's what God's doing in the world today. And when the churches of the East heard about the faith of the believers in Rome, they rejoiced.
Verse 19, Paul says, for your obedience is known to all so that I rejoice over you. Likewise, let's rejoice wherever we find faith in Christ.
There's something amiss if we find more joy in the progress of the Newcastle Knights or the Australian cricket team. Not least because, well, maybe least because they'll disappoint.
But there's a miss, right? If we find more joy in those things, it's easy to find joy in those things. But we're part of a greater team, aren't we? And we strive in a greater contest.
[45:53] And our victory in that contest is assured because it's God himself who strengthens us, Paul says in verse 25, because it's the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that is with us, Paul says in verse 20.

We're part of a greater team and we strive in a greater contest. So let us rejoice wherever we find faith in Christ and give God the glory for it.
To the only wise God, be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.

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