

Greet Each Other

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[0 : 00] Father in heaven, we thank you for your word that renews our minds and transforms us into the image of Jesus.

We ask that you will work through us very powerfully through your Holy Spirit as we hear your word today. In Jesus' name we ask. Amen. Please be seated.

Amen. Well, I think the way that I need to begin the sermon is by thanking Deb Sears for reading that reading.

She deserves hardship pay for that passage and she did it beautifully. At least a medal for reading the Bible. It's one of those readings that on the face of it seems not at all that important.

They're full of names that are not on the top ten list for baby names this year, certainly. Hard for us to pronounce. And they are full of greetings, these whole passages.

[0 : 59] And so you wonder, what benefit is this for us? How is it God's word for us today? But when you spend time considering this passage, you realize that there is much to be treasured here.

There's much for us to learn. And in fact, as I looked at this passage, I realized there are many, many sermons you could preach on this passage. So I'm going to narrow it down to one sermon.

I'm going to just take a bit of a part of what could be said here. And take the part that has to do with the church. It teaches us about what the church is and our place in it as well.

There is much negative media and press about the church. How the church has failed in society in the past. That there is moral failure amongst leaders.

There has been hypocrisy. There is judgmentalism. And people in our city are often wary, if they are not Christians, about coming to church.

[2 : 06] What am I committing myself to, they may wonder. They might be interested in hearing about Jesus. But find it hard to consider the church and being part of it.

And you have, in your own experience, from time to time, had the experience where the church has let you down. And certainly that is what comes out of the fact that sin still resides in our flesh.

This is what Paul has said is true. And so we see that in a church that has sinful people that make it up. But the church with all its failures is also beautiful as well.

God has blessed the world and continues to bless the world in remarkable ways through his church. This is the way his gospel goes out into the world.

It is the way that people are transformed by that gospel as well. Knowing the freedom of the forgiveness of sins. The freedom of serving the living God.

[3 : 09] Of being alive to God as well. But that beauty happens only as people within the church, individuals, are transformed by God.

Do you remember Romans 12, 1 through 2? Paul said, I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, because of those mercies you've heard about throughout Romans, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

And here are two ways to live. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

We do live, all of us, in one of two ways. We are either being conformed to the world and its thinking, or we are being transformed each day by the renewing of our minds.

And it is in the context of gathering with God's people that that transformation happens, and that our minds are renewed. It's as we hear God's word, as brothers and sisters together in Christ, that God renews our minds and transforms it, as we obey that word, as we hear it and allow it to take root.

[4 : 31] And it's because of that, then, that we can bless the world around us, our neighbors, our friends, our co-workers, even our enemies, through Jesus Christ.

This is how it happens. That is how the church becomes beautiful. Now, there is a wonderful prayer in the Book of Common Prayer, and I want you to turn to it now, because we're going to read it at the end together, at the end of this sermon.

I think it really takes what 1 through 16 is teaching us, and brings it into our hearts. Now, there's not enough for all of you, so you'll probably have to share at some point.

At the end of that prayer, which is at the top of the very last page, which is family prayers of the Book of Common Prayer, it asks God that we might use His means of grace, that in all our words and deeds, we might seek His glory and the advancement of His kingdom through Jesus Christ.

Now, here's the mission of the church. This is how the church is beautiful, that by God's grace and through Jesus, all the things that we do and say would advance His kingdom and bring glory to God.

[5 : 46] And this is what has happened in the lives of people that Paul greets in chapter 16. They are real individual people with names and histories that are living for Jesus and His kingdom.

And these people's minds and their relationships and their vocations and their worldviews have all been utterly turned upside down and transformed by Jesus Christ.

And so it's good for us to look at this. And as we do, ask this question of yourself. How has your mind, how is your, the relationships in your life, how is your work and your worldview being changed by the gospel?

How is it being changed now by Jesus, by what you have been learning in this epistle to the Romans? And I want to point out two major changes in all of these people's lives that Paul is greeting.

Two changes. The first is that they've entered a new, loving, united, and diverse family. It's a new family. It's local and it's worldwide.

[7 : 00] And we call it the church. Now it's striking in this list how many differences there are in it because you see men and women. You see names that belong to aristocratic families, Jewish families.

You see names that belong to slaves who are Gentiles. You see people who are strangers to Paul on that list that he names and people who are kinsmen to him.

People who are his close relatives. You see people of very different ethnic groups. They're Greek and they're Roman. They're Jew and they're Gentile. And they come from different religions as well.

All of these people have been transformed by the same gospel. And it says at the very end, if you jump to the very end of our passage, to greet one another with a holy kiss.

In other words, he says, all of you, all of these people that are so different and all of you who make up that church who are so very, very different, do this holy kiss, this greeting, as a way of reminding that you are united to Jesus and our family together.

[8 : 14] And what I mean by that is the kiss was a way that Jewish families greeted one another, acknowledged one another, and said that they were family together.

But this is a holy kiss. It is set aside for God's special purpose. It's a physical greeting that talks about a spiritual reality that God has made one people out of very diverse individuals.

And he has brought them into one people through Jesus' death and his resurrection as their Lord. Now I want to look at that word greeting because it shows up at least 16 times.

It's one of the striking features of this passage. Greet, greet, greet, greet over and over and over again. And basically what that greeting is for Paul is he is asking the people of that church to convey his love to them.

Very simply. He wants them to carry the deep love that Paul has for the church, to the church. And that is why in verse 5, for instance, he says, greet my beloved, my beloved, a panetist.

[9 : 32] And in verse 8, if you look there, greet Ampliatius, my beloved in the Lord. And then in verse 9, my beloved Stachys, greet.

And then in verse 12, greet my beloved Persis. Greet Persis. Now, there are three groups of people involved. When Paul is greeting, he is speaking to, he is saying, greet these individuals.

He names 26 individuals. And so he is saying, greet those people. The other person involved is himself who is doing the greeting. But he is also, the third group of people are the group of people who are listening to the letter.

He is saying, all of you, I want you to greet those people. So I want you to carry my love through you to those people. And these are people that Paul clearly loves.

There is warmth in his greeting. And the amazing thing is, he probably doesn't know all of the people that he has named. Some of them, he just knows about. He has heard about their reputation.

[10 : 41] He knows about their commitment to Christ. But he has worked on knowing about them from a distance. He knows a number of them quite well as well.

They have worked with him in ministry. They have died. They have almost died for him. But for all of them, he is devoted to them. He longs to see them. We heard earlier in Romans.

There is an overflow of affection for this church, for the people in Rome. And he wants those in the churches in Rome that make up the church to love each other in the same way.

So he's modeling that for them. He is showing them what it means to take your part in this new family. Now Jesus wants this as well. He said this at the Last Supper to his disciples, didn't he?

He said, this is how you are going to know, this is how the world will know that you are my disciples if you love one another. Very simply. That was their marching orders.

[11 : 44] That's why Paul is calling for and he's modeling a greeting that is about a church that loves and embraces one another. It is very good and it is beautiful but it is also inconvenient.

It is clearly inconvenient. And this is why this is a good spiritual checkup for us in these greetings because it causes us to ask the question, how is my love for this congregation, for the people that you know and the people that you just know about, how is your love for them in your life?

Are you loving in the way that Paul did? Do you care deeply for those who come to church who are with you on a Sunday morning? Do you care deeply for those you see in the smaller groups throughout the week as well?

Are you concerned for their spiritual well-being, that they are growing in Christ? Do you come to church looking for ways to show your love in practical ways?

Is that your goal when you come? Those greetings really challenge us to consider how we carry our love into other people's lives, which is what Paul's goal is with the greeting as well.

[13 : 07] And I think one of the challenges of being in a bigger church is that there are many people to love. and you can't know everybody. And that's the way Paul was as well.

He could not possibly have known all the people in these various churches in Rome. But Paul's very practical here. And he teaches us that it is helpful to name people in your heart.

To name people. And to pray for those people. As Paul worked on this, you and I can work on this as well. We can be very intentional about connecting names with the faces that we see.

To think of different ways to do that. To consider people that we see in prayer. And we can practice it in some practical ways. For instance, with people that the church is sending up or raising up for various leadership in ministries.

For instance, in the front of your bulletin, there's a letter from Joanne that writes about who the heads of the transition teams are. You may not know who those people are.

[14 : 16] But you can ask God to bless and to help them in their work, in that very specific work that they will be about. People like Kim and Neil and Joanne and Krista and others who are on that.

To pray for them. Pray for the teams that are going out to Malawi and the ones that are in India right now as well. You may not know them. Pray for them by name. Pray for the prayer teams that are here each Sunday at communion as well.

Pray for the Sunday school teachers who teach the children week to week. Pray for youth leaders. Pray for those who are sick. Pray for those who you see in the church that are experiencing physical difficulty or hard times emotionally as well.

You can sense a lot of times who those are. Find out names and pray for them. Now the wonderful thing about this as you think about doing this it is that it is the very opposite of gossip.

Gossip is one of the most destructive activities of the church. It's one of the things that makes the church unattractive. But this is the opposite of it because gossip is naming even people you don't know well in a negative light.

[15 : 35] but what Paul is doing here is to name people in a way that builds them up that helps him to love them and pray for them even people he hasn't met but knew of.

And this is an opportunity for us. The transition to a new building gives us many opportunities in the area of living as a new family. The family of Christ.

It gives us opportunities to look for us to look for people who are struggling with change and to care for them. One of the clear things that people have told me and I've noticed it over the past few weeks is that since the decision from the Supreme Court of Canada came that people are caring for one another better.

They are showing greater kindness to one another. We are looking for ways to build one another up and to see how we are doing. And this is very, very good for us spiritually and it is the beautiful aspect of the church.

There will be great temptation as we make our transition for complaining. We will be inconvenienced. That's what happens with change.

[16 : 50] But to work at loving in ways, in these various ways, drives away complaining and grumbling which is the sin that has beset God's people from the time of Moses to today.

Every generation since Moses. That has been a temptation for the church. But what Paul is showing us here is how to lead a life that is transformed by the gospel of Christ in the carrying of our love to one another.

Now the question is how can I on my own strength be devoted to this new family? It's very inconvenient. It can run against the grain of what I think.

It doesn't come naturally necessarily. And certainly that is the nature of transformation. There is some discomfort involved. But here is the great help that we have.

And that is very simply Jesus has named those who are around you first. And what I mean by that is Jesus said I am the good shepherd and my sheep know me and I call them by name is what he said.

[18 : 04] So there is something very significant about those who we would name in our hearts that are sitting around us. I want you to look at the other phrase that comes up over and over again besides greeting.

And that phrase you've probably picked it out is in Christ or in the Lord. It happens again and again. Look at verse 2. Welcome Phoebe. I commend to you Phoebe in verse 2 that you may welcome her in the Lord.

And verse 3 greet Prisca and Aquila my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. You go down to verse 7. Greet Andronicus and Junia my kinsmen my fellow prisoners they are well known to the apostles they were in Christ before me.

And it goes on like that. Ampliatus in verse 8 my beloved in the Lord. Verse 9 Urbanus fellow worker in Christ a palace approved in Christ and so forth.

Now what that is telling us is incredibly important. He is saying that those who are in church around you have been bought at the price of Jesus' blood for the forgiveness of their sins.

[19 : 15] He has died for the Romans in the Romans place and in our place. He has brought us from slavery to sin and He has made us alive to God.

So because of Jesus the Holy Spirit tells us that we are God's children and that we can call God Father our Heavenly Father.

There is the reason for our love for one another. That is why we are sisters and brothers in Jesus' family. It is because of what Jesus has done for us. He has brought us to be in Christ together.

This passage is filled with Jesus because Jesus is the basis of our unity. He is the center of this new family He has called us into and He has called us by name.

That is why we would reflect that and name those who are around us in a way that builds up and loves and prays. That is where transformation comes.

[20 : 18] That is the beauty of the church. Now, not only has God brought us into a new family in Jesus but secondly and lastly He gives us a new vocation not vacation I am going on vacation on Friday so this is on my mind He gives us a new vocation in Jesus Christ.

There is a new purpose in other words for our life in Him in Christ. And so another repeated phrase that you see is that people are referred to as workers in Christ.

So look at verse 3 It says greet Prisca and Aquila my fellow workers in Christ Jesus and then look down at verse 9 again greet Urbanus he is our fellow worker in Christ and verse 12 greet the beloved Persis who has worked hard in the Lord and just at the beginning of verse 12 greet those workers in the Lord.

You see what Paul is showing us is that all of our work all of our work is meant to glorify God to glorify Jesus Christ and advance His kingdom.

That was the prayer that I referred to before. This is absolutely transforming. If we see our vocation as all about that glorifying God and advancing His kingdom.

[21 : 43] And I want to end with two very wonderful examples in this passage of what that looks like. The first is Phoebe.

Phoebe is at the beginning of our passage the first two verses. She is a single woman she is widowed she has lived in Sanctria she worships there it's a church plant by the way of Corinth so it's just a few miles from Corinth and she is well known for her gospel ministry there she is known as a servant of the church.

This is what she is known first of all as. But at the end of verse two you see also that she is a patron of many and of Paul as well. What that means is she is wealthy and because Sanctria is a port on the west side of Corinth that looks out towards Asia and the Aegean Sea it is very likely that she was a business woman who is involved in international trade but after she came to be in Christ by the gospel she uses her wealth to be a patron of the gospel and as a patron she provides places to stay provisions for Christian workers traveling workers she supports missionaries financially and she uses her networks so that the church can grow.

She did this for Paul and was very helpful to him in his missionary work in Greece. She has worked very closely with him to facilitate the spread of the gospel and she knows that gospel well.

Now do you see how her work has been transformed? No longer is she simply trying to grow and maintain a successful business and increase the influence of that business.

[23 : 35] there is a new overriding purpose. She is using her knowledge and her skills and her network and her contacts and her wealth that she has developed in her business work to advance the kingdom of God to glorify God which is the mission of the church and there is therefore a purpose for her work.

It is all about the gospel even though she continues to work in that and do it well. And you know we are blessed by her today because she is one of the reasons that you and I are reading Romans.

She is clearly somebody who brought the letter from Greece to Rome and she is so clear about the gospel and she is so accomplished and trustworthy that Paul sends her with this letter as his envoy to Rome and she is the one who will give it to the church read it and explain it answer questions and help explain it to the church because she is so clear on the gospel.

We are blessed by her today and so as we think about her we think if you have a vocation outside your home do you see God's overriding purpose for that work as well?

Do you pray about how God can use your work? There is a massive amount of skill and talent and experience in this room and God has ways for us to advance his kingdom through our work and our resources and we ought to give our work as a sacrifice on that altar as well that Paul has called us to.

[25 : 14] Now it's not just single people who are successful in business that Paul is talking about here. He talks about married couples as well like Aquila and Prisca very similar to Phoebe in that they're successful international business people tent makers but again they use their business for the gospel to support missionary work.

The two of them travel all over they've gone from Rome to Corinth to Ephesus to Pontus which is in Turkey and then back now they are in Rome and it's their home which is big enough that it has to lay out tents to hold a lot of people in a church as well.

They are the place where the church meets one of them. So this is a married couple that have committed themselves how can we serve the gospel and there may be couples here who are praying about that.

I encourage you how does God want to take you and use you in ministry together? And then the last thing that's mentioned I said too but there's a third one here that I just want to briefly mention look at the very end in verse 15.

It says greet Philologus Julia Nereus and his sister and Olympus and all the saints who are with them. Well that's one of the churches and he's writing to a family and the family with parents and children are the core of that church.

[26 : 33] It meets in their home. Their family life is certainly disrupted by that fact but what the family as a whole have done is to consider how is God using the whole of our family for the advancement of the kingdom of God and the glory of God.

They were the pillar of the church there. They were a center of the gospel work in Rome. So I want to conclude by asking this question. Is Jesus transforming your life?

In other words is he using you to make the church beautiful? Is your vocation about the advancement of the kingdom of God and the glory of God as well?

This is why God calls us in the church together so we can help each other do that. Are we saying that me as a single person or as a married couple or as a family are we thinking first of all how can we be about that mission of the gospel?

How can we be transformed by Jesus Christ? A couple of weeks ago after the service someone said to me this is the church this is a church but we are the church and that's very true as we go forward you and I are the church that Jesus has bought with his blood for the purpose of transforming him that God might be glorified and that his kingdom might be advanced.

[28 : 09] So let's pray together let's turn in the book of common prayer and we'll pray that God will do this work in our life unify us for the sake of his work.

Let's bow our heads and pray. Most merciful Father we beseech thee to send down thy heavenly blessing upon thy church in this parish that all its members may dwell together in unity and brotherly love.

Keep far from us all self-will and discord and do thy ministers with righteousness and enable them faithfully to dispense thy holy word and sacraments to bring again the outcasts and to seek the lost.

Grant that we may so receive their ministrations and use thy means of grace that in all our words and deeds we may seek thy glory and the advancement of thy kingdom through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Amen.