



BEING JESUS CHRIST TO THE WORLD



Under the authority of Christ, we are bearing a community of Jesus followers for the transformation of the world

“Romans - Paul’s Masterpiece”

Theme: The Letters of Paul

Scripture: Romans 3:21-25a and Romans 12:2

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon

Family/Community Activity for the week: Paul’s missionary journeys carried him many places as he shared the good news of Jesus’ transforming love. The goal of his letters was to help us see how the love of God in Jesus Christ could change our lives so that we live differently. Gather your family for a local “missionary” drive. Before you leave, select a few places you would like to stop and share God’s love in some way. Would you like to take treats to firefighters or police officers and thank them for their service? How about praying for local store owners as you shop? Could you offer to do some yard work for a neighbor? Maybe you could visit a lonely neighbor or those in a nursing home. You might also want to walk through your neighborhood praying for your school and places of worship. Pray and ask God to help your family be missionaries, sharing God’s love wherever you go.

Meditation Moments for Monday, August 14 - Read Romans 3:9-28. John Wesley struggled with opening his spirit to hear and trust the good news that God accepts us by grace, not based on our work. Here’s how he described the moment in his journal when all that changed: *“I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation.”*

- As in so many movie scenes, in this passage the protagonist’s situation is hopeless, with no way out in verse 20. Then, suddenly, we hear a signal that rescue (salvation), which seemed impossible, is in fact on the scene, with the words, “But now” in verse 21. “All have sinned ... but all are treated

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as righteous freely by his grace,” Paul wrote triumphantly. When did this great truth first warm your heart? Does it still?

- Paul used six Scripture quotes (Psalm 51:4, Psalm 14:1-3, Psalm 5:9, Psalm 10:7, Isaiah 59:7-8, and Psalm 36:1) to show that no one, from the most libertine Gentile to the most careful Pharisee, keeps God’s law fully. (One preacher said the moral law is like a sheet of glass. If it’s broken anywhere, it’s broken--cf. James 2:10.) In what ways does this seemingly bad news form us into a community of people with a shared need who live by faith in God’s grace? How might that shared need free a person like John Wesley from shame, so that he could openly accept his need of mercy and grace?

Prayer: *Lord God, through Paul you showed me how to deal with guilt when I do something wrong. I no longer need to turn guilt (“I made a mistake”) into shame (“I AM a mistake.”) Thank you for freeing me--warm my heart today with your grace. Amen.*

Tuesday, August 15 - Read Romans 5: 1-8 and 6:1-4. Paul gives us a powerful idea of how hope can change our lives in this first passage. In Romans 6, the apostle tells us that baptism includes us in Jesus’ death. Both passages are trying to help us understand our human condition and that, in some way, Jesus died for all of us. In a later letter, he wrote to living people, with reference to the same idea, “You died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:4).

- Accepting the grace of Jesus Christ is meant to change how we view the tough stuff in life and how we view the future. Have you been able to sense hope in hard times because of your faith? Why or why not? Read again Romans 5: 3-5 and let those words sink in.
- To those who said, “Let’s sin more so that there can be more grace,” Paul replied that we can’t truly accept God’s grace without dying to our old way of living. Our baptism, he said, is the acted out, symbolic way we show that we’re serious about that. In what ways have you seen Christ’s gift of new life break the ruling power of sin in your life? What are your ongoing areas of struggle? (If you’ve never been baptized, but want to be, please contact the church office. We have our annual river baptism service on Sunday, August 28th at 1:30 p.m. at Eagle Park in Bayfield and we would love to have you join us!)

Prayer: *Lord, free me more and more from the habits and ways of thinking that keep me enslaved. Guide me so that I may “walk in newness of life” with you. Amen.*

Wednesday, August 16 - Read Romans 8:28, 35-39. The apostle Paul did not believe God caused evil things, but he knew they happened. “Trouble, or distress, or harassment, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword”—he’d faced all these and more (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:23-27), yet his list was not a complaint. He wrote it to say, “In all these things we win a sweeping victory through the one who loved us” (verse 37). No matter what life throws at us, we can march with Paul and a long line of believers in God’s eternal victory parade.

- Paul asked a compelling question: “Who will separate us from Christ’s love?” His wording assumed that the answer was “Nobody and nothing!” What situations are most likely to leave you feeling separated from God’s love? What spiritual “anchors” keep you connected to God’s love, hope and peace, even when times get difficult?
- Today’s scripture did not say, as people sometimes think, that “all things” are good—they’re not. It says God, who is always good, can take even painful and difficult things and bend them to serve a good purpose, if we are willing to put them in God’s hands. Can you look back and see times when God has brought good out of hard things you have faced? What are you facing right now that is painful, frustrating or scary?

Prayer: *All-powerful God, whatever comes my way, hold me close in the shelter of your love. Thank you that, through you, I can win a sweeping victory in “all these things.” Amen.*

Thursday, August 17 - Read Romans 10:12-15. Paul stated a premise behind all his missionary preaching in verse 12: “There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord is Lord of all.” Many of his contemporaries disagreed strongly. But he pointed to their own Scriptures, quoting Joel 2:32 in verse 13, and Isaiah 52:7 in verse 15. God wanted to reach everyone in the world, he said. And how were all those people going to hear about God’s love, about Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, if no one went and preached to them?

- For us, the main divisions are not between Gentiles and Jews (though we should get rid of any lingering anti-Semitic attitudes or practices). But disparities in educational level, income, social prestige and other factors block many people from feeling welcome in the church. And too often,

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Christians (intentionally or not) adopt an “if you build it, they will come” attitude: “We’re here every weekend—it’s not our fault if they don’t come.”

- Paul’s challenge resonates: “How can they call on someone they don’t have faith in? And how can they have faith in someone they haven’t heard of? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent?” What role can you play in taking the love of Jesus outside the walls of the church? Will you do it?

Prayer: *O God, I’m so grateful that your love has found me, and is reshaping my life day by day. Help me not to hoard that love, but to find ways to use my gifts, talents and contacts to share your love, to be a bearer of good news. Amen.*

Friday, August 18 - Read Romans 11:1, 9:1-8. Paul loved his Hebrew heritage. Seeing many of his people (though certainly not all of them) reject Jesus as Messiah hurt him. He wrestled with the question, “Had God rejected God’s people?” He found a key in the Genesis 21 story of Abraham’s two sons, Isaac and Ishmael. Both were genetically Abraham’s children, but only Isaac was the son of promise. Their story showed, Paul said, that “descent” from Abraham was spiritual, not just genetic.

- Scholar William Barclay said Paul concluded “there is more to Jewishness than descent from Abraham, that the chosen people were not simply the entire sum of all of Abraham’s physical descendants.” Paul also told his Galatian converts that “if you belong to Christ, then indeed you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29). How much do you understand about the Hebrew, Old Testament roots of your faith? How might you learn to know and value that more highly?
- Have you ever had—perhaps have now—someone you care about deeply who just doesn’t see the same importance of faith in Christ that you do? Does that cause you grief or concern, as it did Paul? Is there any part of your family or faith heritage that you care about, and yet have felt the need to move away from? Paul loved God, if anything, even more passionately as a Christian than as a Pharisee. What underlying, deeper parts of your heritage can you honor even if you live them in a different way?

Prayer: *Lord God, it’s remarkable to trace my spiritual family tree all the way back to the great patriarch Abraham. You worked to bless the world through him and his descendants. Since I’m one of those descendants, please bless the world through me. Amen.*

Saturday, August 19 - Read Romans 12:5-10, 13:8. We know, as a matter of history, that there were no Christian church buildings in Rome when Paul wrote this letter to the Christians there. We also know, from the content of his letter, that disputes over how to live out their faith divided Roman Christians (cf. Romans 14:1-10). Even without impressive buildings, Paul believed that building stronger relationships could make them stand out in that cutthroat city: “Be the best at showing honor to each other.”

- For Paul, loving others was not just something to be done with gritted teeth. “Whoever loves another person has fulfilled the Law,” said the former Pharisee, who once thought of the Law very differently (cf. Philippians 3:4-7). Honest love (“without pretending”) reshapes our life, and fills it with meaning and joy. When have you found in your own life, and in the lives of people you know well, how genuinely loving people make all of life better?
- John Wesley, Methodism’s founder, asked in one of his best-known sermons, “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion?” Who has lovingly helped you in your personal journey to “know, love, and serve God,” without trying to make your journey into a clone of their own? How can you best extend that same kind of supportive, generous love to others?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, sometimes it seems so much easier to pretend to love certain other people than to genuinely love them. Teach me that “pretend” love impoverishes my life, and keep leading me to your kind of genuine love. Amen.*

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Theme: *Transformed by the Letters of Paul*
“Romans - Paul’s Masterpiece”
Sermon preached by Jeff Huber August 12-13, 2017

Scripture: Romans 3: 21-25a and 12:2

VIDEO Sermon Intro

SLIDE “Romans - Paul’s Masterpiece”

An English schoolteacher was in Switzerland and looking for a room to rent for when she would begin her teaching there the following fall. She asked the schoolmaster if he would recommend any places to stay. He took her to see several rooms, and when everything was settled she returned home to make final preparations for the move. When she arrived home, the thought suddenly occurred to her that she had not seen a Water Closet (the phrase the English use for toilet) around the place. She immediately wrote a note to the schoolmaster asking him if there was a “W.C.” near the room.

The schoolmaster was a poor master of English so he asked the parish priest about the meaning of the letters “W.C.” and the only solution they could come up with for the letters was, “Wayside Chapel”. The schoolmaster then wrote the following note to the English lady seeking a “W.C.” with her room.

Dear Madam: I take great comfort in informing you that a “W.C.” is situated nine miles from the house in the corner of a beautiful grove of pine trees, surrounded by lovely grounds. It is capable of holding 229 people, and it is open on Sundays and Thursdays only. As there are a great many people expected during the summer months, I would suggest that you come early, although there is usually plenty of standing room. This is an unfortunate situation, particularly if you are in the habit of going regularly. You will no doubt be glad to hear that a good many bring their lunch and make a day of it, while others, who can’t afford to go by car, arrive just in time. I would especially advise your ladyship to go on Thursdays when there is an organ accompanist. The acoustics are excellent and even the most delicate sounds can be heard everywhere. It may interest you to know that my daughter was married in the “W.C.” and it was there that she met her husband. I can remember the rush there was for seats. There were ten people to a seat usually reserved for one, and it was wonderful to see the expression on their faces.

The newest attraction is a bell, donated by a wealthy resident of the district, which rings every time a person enters. A Bazaar is to be held to raise money for plush seats for all, since the people believe it is a long felt want. My wife is rather delicate so she can’t go regularly: it is almost a year since she went last. Naturally it pains her not to be able to go more often. I shall be delighted to reserve the best seat for you, if you wish, where you will be seen by all. For the children, there is a special time so that they will not disturb the elders.

Hoping to have been of some service to you, I remain,

Sincerely, The Schoolmaster

I share that letter with you as we begin a new series of sermons on the letters of the Apostle Paul. The letter about the WC points to an important truth about reading the letters of Paul, or any other parts of the Bible for that matter. If you don’t know the history and the context of a letter, then it sometimes is very challenging to understand the content. We sometimes forget, especially when it comes to the New Testament, that many of the sections we call books were really letters, most of them written by the Apostle Paul to churches or individuals.

Today, we begin looking at those letters in a series of sermons I have wanted to do for a while, but I waited until I had a chance to travel to some of the places to which Paul wrote his letters. I was (*Message Notes and Meditation Moments for August 12-13, 2017*) For more, go to www.fumcdurango.org

able late last year to travel to Italy, Turkey and Greece with many of you tracing some of Paul's journeys and in many ways the letters came to life as we traveled and learned together.

Each week we'll see some photos and video footage of the areas where Paul wrote letters, and we'll try to understand the background and context of that letter so we can better understand it for our lives. Most importantly, I want us to recognize that Paul wrote his letters with ONE purpose in mind: to share the Good News of Jesus Christ AND guide people in how they might be transformed, from the inside out, into becoming deeply committed followers of Jesus. Here at First United Methodist Church we strive to be Jesus Christ to the world. We believe we do this...

GRAPHIC **...under the authority of Christ, we are becoming a community of Jesus followers for the transformation of the world.**

My hope is that, over the coming weeks looking at Paul's letters, we can begin to see and experience together the transformation Paul experienced himself and why he wrote to those early churches about this change of mind, heart and soul.

At this point, would you please take out of your bulletin your Meditation Moments and Message Notes? There is the Scripture listed at the top that we will be using today and some blank lines free to write down anything you like to try and remember from today's message. My hope is that you will write down things which will help you read the Scriptures more deeply in the coming weeks. Below that our daily Scripture readings from the book of Romans which will help you read the Bible on your own. The message today and the Meditation Moments are a package deal. The goal is that you would not only listen to the sermon but you would follow up with some deep reading on your own to see how the Scriptures might apply to your life today. My hope is they will come to life when you do these together.

Each week during the series you also will have a card like this one. Would you pull this out please? On one side you, will find the theme verse for this entire series from Romans 12:2. On the other side, you will find a Scripture memory verse that we hope you will spend time memorizing this week. Early Methodists made it a point to memorize Scriptures. My great-grandmother learned to read using the Bible and knew much of it by heart. We've gotten away from that and so I would like to encourage us over the next weeks to see if we can't memorize one Scripture verse each week. None of them will be very long, and many of them are already familiar to you. We are going to put one Scripture from the letters of Paul each week on a card for you to take with you and put in your car or on your bathroom mirror or in your wallet or somewhere where you will see it each day. I had one person tell me they would put this as the screensaver on their computer and on their phone so they would see it every time they looked at their technology. If you will read it every morning out loud and read it every evening out loud, then you can pass the pop quiz I will give you next weekend in worship! Let's get started by reading this together out loud from Romans 8:28.

BIBLE ***28 And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.***

This is a powerful passage of Scripture that reminds us, no matter what was happening in our lives, God is holding all of it AND us. God does not bring evil into our lives but God can and will bend evil to be used for his purposes. We take great hope in the words that follow this text which reminds us that nothing can separate us from the love of God and God does not abandon us. God is always working in us and through us, if we will allow him to work in our hearts and lives. I hope you will take this Scripture and memorize it and allow it to sink in your heart over the next week.

You may know that the apostle Paul was originally persecuting Christians when he was a Roman soldier named Saul. We believe that he was part of the stoning of Stephen, one of the first Christian martyrs. He was then on the road to Damascus struck blind and had a vision of the risen Christ. It touched his life and his heart and he, overnight, went from persecuting Christians to being the greatest missionary of the Christian faith. You can read about Paul's ministry and conversion and missionary journeys in the book of Acts, where he then traveled around the Roman world preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. He traveled more than 10,000 miles on four missionary journeys, taking the gospel wherever people would listen. He went into every small town that he could find and he would enter the synagogue and preach to his fellow Jews that Jesus was a long-awaited, Jewish Messiah. Some believed and some did not.

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Inevitably, those Jews who believed in Jesus as the Messiah would be cast out of the synagogue. They began to form their own churches and worship was patterned from their experiences in the synagogue. Paul would minister in those churches for three or four weeks and sometimes longer. He would then appoint leaders to those congregations and he would leave to go preach the gospel in other towns. Months later, he would send back one of his young protégés or residents, people like Titus for Timothy or Silas, with a letter written to that community that was meant to encourage them and teach them and help them continue to grow in their faith.

Paul established dozens of churches and he probably wrote hundreds of letters during his travels, but only 13 of those letters have been preserved. At the time they were written, they were scrolls which were read to the congregation. Some letters were probably set aside after they were read, but other letters were treasured and they eventually began to be shared among the churches. They began to be viewed as Scripture because of the wisdom within and because it seemed that the Holy Spirit was a part of their content. 9 of these letters are written to churches and 4 of them are written to individuals.

You probably know that the New Testament contains first the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Following John, we find the book of the Acts of the Apostles. This is part two of Luke's gospel, which tells the story of the early church, with the last chapters of that book telling us about the apostle Paul. This is why the body of Paul's letters immediately follows this book of Acts. The 9 letters to churches are placed first and then we find the 4 letters to individuals. Within those groupings, they are not organized by date or alphabetical order, but by length. Romans, being 16 chapters long, is the first of the letters to churches. The last of the letters is 2 Thessalonians which is only three chapters. The letters to individuals begin with 1 Timothy which is 6 chapters long and the last of the letters is Philemon and it's only 1 chapter.

The earliest documents that were written in your New Testament were the letters of Paul. The Gospels were not written until later, when the disciples began to die off, and they wanted to be sure to pass on the good news of the message of Jesus Christ before they died. Paul's first letter was probably Galatians, written around 49 A.D. The rest of his letters were written between 49 and 64 A.D., when we believe Paul was put to death in Rome. Today's letter to the Romans we think was written in 57 A.D.

The truth is that I cannot cover an entire letter and do it justice in one week. Each one of these letters of Paul probably deserves its own series of sermons, especially Romans which is 16 chapters. My goal each week is simply to give you an overview to help you better understand the letter so that you might be encouraged to read the letter on your own during the week. You will find commentaries that will go verse by verse through the letter to the Romans, but that would take you an entire year. The very beginning of the commentary would be called the introduction, which covers things like the historical setting, the basic outline and the major themes in the letter. That's what we're going to do each week with these letters. The Meditation Moments we give you will help you dig deeper on your own. That's why the sermon goes together with those Meditation Moments. I think you will get the most out of the sermons by reading the Scriptures on your own each week.

I also want to encourage you to bring your Bibles with you each week because we will be walking through each of the letters and you will have a chance to write down things in your Bible. You also can use Bibles that are in the pews, and if you don't have a good study Bible, we will give you one out in the connection point in the atrium.

I do want to give you one word about reading your Bible this week as you look at the letter to the Romans. This is a very thick book and I will be honest and tell you that at times, I find passages difficult to read because Paul's language can be very complex and hard to understand. Even biblical scholars who have studied it their whole lives, say there are certain parts of the letter they are not certain whether it means one thing or another. So, when you read it this week, don't get caught up on whether you understand every word. Instead, look for the things that you do understand. Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you and I promise it will be a rewarding experience in your walk with Christ. I want to be clear that I'm not asking you to ignore parts of the Bible, but just remember that we don't always understand everything the first time we read it. I have read through the book of Romans many times, and each time there is a passage that comes to life for me that I didn't really understand before. This is the nature of the Scriptures, they are meant to be the Living Word of God and not stagnant, so allow them to touch your heart in that way.

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The book of Romans might be better called, “The Gospel of St. Paul.” The letter to the Romans is often referred to as Paul’s “magnum opus,” for it’s his masterpiece. John Knox, one of the 20th century’s outstanding New Testament scholars, writes this, **“Not only is Romans the longest letter of Paul, it is the weightiest, and it is unquestionably the most important theological book ever written.”**

It is not only a theological book, but a practical one as well. The material in the last part of this Romans, dealing with how we should live our lives, has influenced Western civilization as much as any document that was ever written. Even those who are not Christians, have been influenced by this book even though they may not realize it. The letter is profound and powerful, and every verse drips with meaning.

Let’s try to understand the historical setting of this letter to the Romans. Tradition tells us that the church in Rome was founded around 42 A.D. by the apostle Peter made a missionary journey there, but we don’t really know how accurate that tradition is because there is no record in the New Testament of Paul or Peter making a journey to Rome. Peter’s life certainly ended in Rome, and no doubt there were Jewish believers in Christ in Rome very early in the first century. Most believe there were Jewish believers who were there on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem who made their way back to Rome. There most likely were also other Jewish Christians who had heard Paul preach and heard the message of the gospel who also made their way to Rome, remembering that, “all roads lead to Rome.”

Jewish Christians in Rome would go to the synagogue and they would share their faith and eventually they formed their own synagogue and they continued to worship the Lord and their numbers began to grow and they became a church. At the time that Paul writes in 57 A.D., the church had experienced tremendous growth but they didn’t have a large sanctuary in which to gather. Instead, they met in people’s homes and there were hundreds of house churches in the city of Rome where people gathered together and worshiped in small groups in the first century.

Paul is writing to this church at a time before the persecutions had begun against Christians, when the church had to go underground. Our children went to the underground church in Rome as part of Vacation Bible School in June, but that would’ve happened around 65 A.D. A bit of history will help us better understand this letter. In 19 A.D., the Emperor Tiberius expelled all Jews from the city of Rome. They were gradually allowed to return, but in 49 A.D., Emperor Claudius once more expelled all Jews from the city of Rome. When that happened, the church in Rome was left with only Gentile believers, those who were not Jewish. The church started as a Jewish Christian church and then Gentiles who became followers of Jesus began to join. Even the Jewish Christians were forced to leave Rome and so all that is left are Gentile Christians.

In 54 A.D. the Emperor Claudius was poisoned by his wife and died, so that her son, who was Claudius’ stepson, could ascend to the throne as Emperor. That boy’s name was Nero. The first thing Nero does in 54 A.D. as the new Emperor is to rescind all of Claudius’ orders, so the Jews are allowed to return to the city of Rome. For five years, the church in Rome has been without Jewish believers. For five years, the church in Rome has been without Jewish believers and has been separated from its roots. Now, both Jewish Christians and those who are Jewish who don’t believe in Jesus as the Messiah, returned to the city of Rome. This creates tension in the church because it has become a uniquely Gentile church and now the Jewish Christians return, seeking to give influence again as they did before when they were leaders. How did the Jews and Gentiles come together again as believers, living together in the same church? Once you solve that dilemma, you still have Jews who are not believers in the Messiah and there has always been tension between those groups of Jewish believers and nonbelievers.

SLIDE Tension between Jews and Gentiles

This is a dilemma that was being faced in the church and its part of the historical setting. This is why, over and over again in the book of Romans, you will find Paul referring to Jewish believers and Gentile believers, as well as Jews who are not believers in Jesus as the Messiah. **In the Roman church among the Gentiles, there had developed a little bit of the spirit of Rome, which was somewhat anti-Semitic.** They weren’t blatantly anti-Semitic, but the Gentiles had come to believe that they were doing just fine without the Jewish believers, thank you very much, and the Jewish believers sensed that. Some of the Jews believed they were God’s chosen people and these Gentiles were just along for

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the ride. This tension was prevalent throughout the Roman church and Paul is writing to remind the Gentiles that the gospel was given to the Jews first, and then to the Greek. He reminds the Jews that the Gentiles are fully brothers and sisters in Christ because we are not made righteous by the works of the Jewish law, but by the grace of Jesus Christ. This is the theme that you will find throughout the book of Romans.

SLIDE Paul was concerned that the Jews and Gentiles in Rome were getting faith right.

A second theme to be aware of is that Paul had never been to Rome yet. His life would end in Rome, but he never visited the Roman church before he wrote this letter, and since he was the apostle to the Gentiles and this was primarily a Gentile church, Paul wanted to make sure they were getting it right. He wants to lay out for them the gospel that he preached throughout the Roman world. He wants to say, "Here's what it means to be a Christian. Here's why we need Jesus. Here's the difference that he makes in our lives. Here's how we live according to the Holy Spirit." Paul is trying to make sure that the gospel they are receiving lines up with the gospel that he is preaching so there is consistency.

There's one more thing about the context I want you to not only hear about but see. When we were in Rome, Greece and Turkey in the fall, there was one thing that profoundly affected me in every city we visited. It was amazing to see what life was like in the day of Paul, living within the prevalence of the Greco-Roman pantheon of gods. No matter where you went, there were temples built to the gods. Up on the screen you can see the ruins of the Roman Forum where there was the Temple of Saturn, the Temple of Castor and Pollux, and the Temple of Concord.

GRAPHIC Roman Forum Ruins

One of the stops on our trip was the island of Delos, near Mykonos, Greece. Delos was like the Switzerland of the Greco-Roman world because just about every culture had a bank or trading post on this island, and there is layer upon layer of Ruins. There were ruins to just about every one of the Greco-Roman God's. One of the most famous remnants are the Lions of Delos. The lions seemed to have been placed in a position to either symbolically guard the site, or to simply inspire a sense of divine power to travelers on their way to Apollo's shrine in the area.

GRAPHIC Lions of Delos

GRAHPIC View of Apollos

GRAPHIC Delos Temple of Apollo

GRAPHIC Temple of Apollos Floor

GRAPHIC Mosaic of Dionysus on Delos

GRAPHIC Ruins and Mountain of Delos

GRAPHIC Xenica & Bliss Temple of Isis

VIDEO Top of Delos

There were ruins here at the top and you can see as we pan around what an amazing view it would've been from this main Temple. People would come here to consult the gods and find out what the gods will was for their lives. They were not allowed to go into a temple if you are an ordinary person. Instead, you would bring an offering to the priests. They would come outside the temple to see if your offering was acceptable, and if it was, they would ask you, "What's your question?"

The priest would go into a lower level of the temple where there was a woman who was able to discern the will of the gods. This is a volcanic island and so there were fissures in the earth and she would sniff the gases coming out of the earth, and then she would begin to have visions. (There was also an empty theater on this island where they would have rock concerts in the '60's!) After she had these visions, she would come back and express a statement that was obscure and most people couldn't understand. They would scratch their heads and leave, maybe sometimes like you do after a sermon. They would try to understand what this unusual saying or Oracle meant for them in their lives.

We learned about the Greco-Roman gods as we toured these different sites and it was clear that those Greco-Roman gods were pretty capricious. They either liked you or they didn't like you, and if they didn't like you then you would be in trouble, and even if they did like you, you might be in
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trouble, because they were the gods and they could do whatever they wanted to. They believed the Romans gods mated with human beings, sometimes creating superhumans, like the emperors.

Legend was conveniently developed that one of Augustine Caesars great-grandparents was the result of the union between one of the gods and his great great-grandmother. There was divinity or deity in the bloodstream of the Caesars it was believed, and Nero was a part of the bloodline of Augustus Caesar. Nero claimed the title of, "Lord of all the earth." Temples were built to the emperors because they were living lords that you could see and touch. The rest of the gods hid behind Mount Olympus, but you could see the Emperor, a living God, lord of all the earth. Yet, when you began to study their lives, you may not like what you found out about the lord.

When we were in Ephesus, we saw one of the temples built to Nero among the ruins. People would come and pay homage to him as a god, yet Nero brought children into his palace to abuse them. He castrated one of his slaves and forced him to marry him. He went out on the streets at night dressed in a wig and if someone got in his way he would stab them, because he was the Emperor that he could do it he wanted. Nero's mother was repulsed by his activities, so he decided what was good enough for his stepfather was good enough for his mother and he had her killed.

VIDEO **Colosseum** *(run this video during the text below)*

Seven years after the writing of Paul's letters, Nero would have Christians burned alive and fed to the lions in the Coliseum. Here is a picture of a cross in the Coliseum today to commemorate those acts.

GRAPHIC **Cross in Colosseum**

Nero would have Christians crucified all around the Coliseum during the persecution of Christians during his reign. This was the man who was called "lord of all the earth." It's into that setting that we read the theme versus of Paul's letter to the Romans in chapter 1:16 - 17. Paul tells us at the very beginning of his letter what he is going to say the next 16 chapters.

BIBLE ***16 For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile. 17 This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."***

BIBLE ***17 This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight.***

I want us to notice this verse again. The book of Romans is the story of God making us right, which is another way of saying righteousness. The good news is meant to bring us healing and wholeness and holiness. It is the story of the justice of God. All these images are captured in that idea of being made right in God's sight. The book of Romans tells us about the God who is proclaimed and seen through Jesus Christ, in his life and ministry and death and resurrection. He is not a God who would wait to see what your sacrifice was before he would give you the truth or make things right. He is not a God who keeps us outside the temple while the priests alone came inside. He was not a God who was capricious and hated some and showed favor to others arbitrarily. He was not a God who would abuse children or looked anything like Nero.

He is the Lord who was made known in Jesus Christ, who took children on his knees and loved them and blessed them. He is the Lord who was made known in Jesus Christ and who saw the sick and brought them healing. When people who were sick got in his way, he did not stab them, but he touched them and healed them. He is the Lord who would reach out to the downcast and those who were told they were no good and unworthy and unlovable, and he would love them with his whole heart and eventually give his life for a thief and murderer on the cross next to him. It was on the cross that he showed forgiveness for those who put him there, so we could see and experience what it means to heal broken hearts and broken lives that seem like they are beyond repair.

This is why Paul says that he is not ashamed to proclaim this gospel. What Paul was proclaiming was seditious and dangerous in the first century. Caesar was meant to be called lord, sitting on his throne in Rome. And yet Paul was making it clear that he was not and that Jesus Christ is the one and only Lord of all, God in the flesh. Everywhere that Paul proclaimed this message, people began to flock

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to it because that was not only the truth but it was life-giving instead of life taking. This is the message of the book of Romans, that our God is righteous and just and that is revealed for us when God came in the flesh, Jesus Christ.

I want to finish by giving you a summary of the book of Romans, which I will admit does not do it justice. But, you may want to write this down as it may be helpful as you read the book this week.

SLIDE Chapters 1 & 2 - The Problem

SLIDE Chapters 3 & 4 - The Solution

SLIDE Chapters 5, 6, 7 & 8 - The Implications of following Jesus

SLIDE Chapters 9, 10 & 11 - What about the Jews?

SLIDE Chapters 12, 13, 14 & 15 - How we live as followers of Jesus

SLIDE Chapter 16 - A Final Greeting

Some of you may have heard somewhere along the way a phrase about the book of Romans called, "The Roman road to salvation." In our United Methodist heritage, we call this...

GRAPHIC **The Way of Salvation**

If you have been here for any length of time you may have heard me talk about this in one of our classes or in a sermon, but the book of Romans helps us see this very clearly. I have put it as a graphic inside your bulletin today and we are going to trace it out on the video screens together and the bulletin may be easier for you to read.

GRAPHIC **Good!**

We begin by remembering that you were made by God to be loved by God. God created everything in it was good. God created humans and it was VERY good! It's the only thing in the process of creation that we are told was very good, and that's us. Paul alludes to this in the opening two verses of his letter.

BIBLE ***1 This letter is from Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News. 2 God promised this Good News long ago through his prophets in the holy Scriptures.***

We are the apple of God's eye, but then the apple became a problem. But we can't really understand the good news of the gospel and really appreciate it until we understand the problem, or the bad news. I was out in California for part of my time off and lately they have been getting tons of rain and it felt like a real blessing and good news, because before that there were six years of drought. We don't really appreciate that good news of refreshing rain until we have been honest about the bad news.

GRAPHIC **Human Condition**

We understand this to be our human condition. Each one of us is born and while that is a good thing and we are meant to be a blessing, it doesn't take long for us to make the world about us. We cry because we want to be changed. We cry because we are hungry. We cry because we need someone to attend to our every need and the world is all about us.

GRAPHIC **Original Sin**

In theological terms, we call this Original Sin. I want to remind you that this is simply meant to be a description of our human condition, it is not meant to be a label that we bash people with. What's interesting in Romans is that Paul begins by talking about the murderers and the people who have done really bad and horrible things, and we start thinking we are okay because we don't do those things. We begin to think, "Thank God I'm not like those people." Most people would be reading and say, "You go Paul. You are right. All those people are wicked and bad. Preach it brother!"

But then Paul comes to the end of chapter 1 and he begins to step on our toes. Those wicked people are disobedient to their parents. They gossip about their neighbors and coworkers. They are lustful in their hearts. They are overly ambitious. They are selfish and on and on he goes until he really

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has talked about every single one of us. Every one of us has been selfish at some point or another in our lives, wanting to make the world all about us. Every one of us has said things we wish we hadn't said. Every one of us has done things we wish we hadn't done. This is part of being human and what Paul writes about in Romans 3 when he is outlining the problem.

BIBLE *21 But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. 22 We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.*

23 For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. 24 Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. 25 For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin.

All of us struggle with the same problem. There is something inside of us that is not quite right. But even then, God is still loving us and wooing us and longing for us to know that he made us to love us. Paul makes that very clear in Romans 5:8 where he says these powerful words that many of us have memorized.

BIBLE *8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.*

GRAPHIC **Prevenient Grace**

We call this Prevenient Grace, or the grace that goes before. God made you to love you and there's nothing you can do about it. My atheist friends who tell me they don't believe in God, I look in the eye and I tell them very clearly, "Too bad. God still believes in you. God will love you and woo you until the day you die."

I was recently talking to someone who was mistreated by her father growing up and who has been betrayed by her husband and she wondered if she was worth anything and even lovable. Our human condition has us listen to the tapes that other people will say about us and our experiences will ring in our ears and those old tapes will play over and over again. It's in the middle of that that Paul longs for us to hear that we were made by God to be loved by God and God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us, while we were still broken and imperfect. I can tell her and each one of you with certainty that God has hopes and plans and dreams for you and he loves you more than you can ever imagine. He made you to love you. This is that Prevenient Grace and the good news that comes in the midst of the bad news.

GRAPHIC **Aha!**

What Paul want us to here clearly is the first part of verse 8, "**But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ...**" We finally have that moment of aha! It's that moment that we recognize that Christ died for us and we are loved and we don't have to live with the pain and the shame and hurt and the brokenness. We call this the moment of justification and in that moment, we experience Justifying Grace.

GRAPHIC **Justifying Grace**

BIBLE *11 So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.*

Paul captures this idea with the beautiful image in verse 11, and in many other places in his letter to the Romans. We are doing our River baptism service in two weeks, and many choose to do a reaffirmation of baptism with us on that day. Many of us were baptized as infants but don't remember it and sometimes we drift away from faith and we push God away, but through all that God is still loving us. We come back to faith and in that moment, we have our aha! One of my favorite things to do is to do a baptism, or reaffirmation of baptism, in the river after someone has come through a death in their family or a divorce or finally coming to terms with an addiction. I can remember one man with a huge grin on his face and as I hugged him and prayed the prayer of the Holy Spirit he said, "**I can feel the Holy Spirit washing off the grime of my past.**"

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The challenge is that this is where many feel like their journey comes to an end. We start feeling, "I'm good. Everything will be great now." We envision life will now be like this because we have Jesus at the center.

GRAPHIC (dotted line straight up)

That's what happens, isn't it? We say yes to Jesus and experience his justification by faith and then everything is perfect and life is one straight line up to heaven! No, of course this is not the way it works. More often it looks like this...

GRAPHIC (zig zag solid line)

Life goes up and down and sometimes we feel God's presence and his closeness and other times we feel far away from God and we wonder where God is. What we believe is people of faith, and what Paul shares in the letters to the Romans, is that God is at work even in this movement of up and down in life. We don't believe that God causes these things to happen, but we do believe that if we give them to God he can take them and mold them and shape them and bend evil to his purposes. As a matter of fact, this is how we become more like Christ. We call this...

GRAPHIC Sanctifying Grace

Sanctification is the process of becoming more holy and allowing ourselves to be shaped into the image of Christ through the broken places in our lives. You know this is true. It's those hard places in life that you have gone through which have made you who you are and shape to the most. It is those places, which we sometimes hold on to our faith by our fingernails, that we can most experience a closeness with God. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, used to say that we are all, "going on to perfection."

GRAPHIC Perfection

None of us will get there in this life, but each of us is going on to perfection in this way of salvation which leads to sanctification which leads to holiness and becoming more like Christ. But, it can only happen if we are willing to turn our lives and our herds and our aches and our pains in our brokenness and our imperfections in our human condition over to the Lord of life, Jesus Christ, who lived our lives and took upon him our brokenness, the sins of the world, and who invites us to rise with him. Paul captures this in Romans 6:6-11.

BIBLE *6 We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. 7 For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. 8 And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. 9 We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. 10 When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. 11 So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.*

During this series of sermons, we are not just going to look at some historical realities and do some biblical exegesis. We are going to hear from people in this congregation who have been transformed by their relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Many of them found that transformation to be very powerful here in this church. So, throughout this series we have interviewed several of you so we might hear and see living treasures of transformation in Jesus Christ.

Today's interview is a bit different. Some of you know that we had a young woman on our staff who died in May after a short battle with cancer. Heather was just 40 years old and I did her wedding in January to her husband Brad and she was diagnosed in February and we did her funeral in June. I've known Heather for most of my time here in Durango and it was both painful and a blessing to walk with her the last few months of her life, as did many of you who visited and care for her and her family. She sent me several emails in the midst of her cancer treatments and this past week I called her husband Brad and asked if I could read some of those to you as part of the sermons, so you could see a powerful moment of transformation and sanctification in her life. He told me that I was welcome to, but he also had some audio recordings of Heather that she had left him as a gift. One of them was about her experience of God in the midst of her suffering and I found a both profound and moving. His

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permission, I want to share with you her face story from the last few months of her life.

VIDEO Heather Gain Kill

(For those of you who cannot see or hear the video, we have provided one of Heather's email to Jeff that captures the audio) *It was nice seeing you today, Jeff, thank you very much for meeting with Brad and I. I've been thinking a lot about the question you asked me ... cancer actually saved my life. So, I asked myself this... How did cancer save my life? Cancer Saved My Life by actually giving me life. Cancer brought me closer to God and God is life and I believe I feel more alive than I have ever felt in my life because of this. I have lived more in the last few months than I have over 40 years.*

I leave you with these words from the apostle Paul in Romans 8 that includes our Scripture memory verse for this week.

BIBLE ***28 And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.***

31 What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?

35 Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death?

37 No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

Let's pray...

SLIDE Prayer

Loving God, thank you for the apostle Paul who gave us this beautiful letter to the Romans. We don't always understand everything we read, but help us to claim those things we do understand as the truth that you made us to love us. Sometimes our humanness gets in the way and we can't hear those words. Help us to hear your voice above all the noise in our world and the old tapes that play.

God, forgive us for those times we have hurt others and said things to cause pain. May we remember that just because we lie, we are not a liar. That does not define us or who you made us to be. Help us to see you in the midst of our brokenness, and as we repent and turn around to follow your son Jesus Christ, set us free for the new life you have for us, no matter how long or our short. Help us to know that you are at work in the ups and downs of life, working to sanctify us and make us more like your son Jesus Christ. They we give all those moments to you so that we might go on to perfection and experience the joy of your everlasting love. The name of your son Jesus we pray. Amen

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