

Exodus 3: 1-15

Psalms 105: 1-6, 23-26, 45c

Pentecost 14 2023.

Romans 12: 9-21

St. Matthew 16: 21-28

“Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.” Romans 12: 16

Years ago, I visited a high school friend, Lib Sircom, as she was living in Paris, France. Lib’s always been artistic, and she paints for a living. While I was visiting, she took me to the famous Louvre Art Museum in Paris...

I found it interesting to watch Lib, as she looked at all these wonderful piece of art... Some of the paintings were in large galleries, and Lib would begin by looking from across the room at the whole painting – to see the big picture. Then, time and again, she would draw much closer. Sometimes she would look at very fine details, such as the way an artist would paint a finger or a few strands of hair. That is, to appreciate these paintings, Lib would take in the overall view, but she would also focus on interesting details...

I think this is an appropriate way for Christians to look at the Bible, at scripture. Sometimes we need to look at the details – a beautiful phrase; a provoking sentence. Sometimes we need to look at the overall story – of this amazing God we worship... From the instant of creation to the fulfilment of all things, we are being confronted by *God*, revealed supremely through Jesus Christ. The Bible as a whole reveals all this, and the Church’s job is to proclaim and to live out this reality...

So this morning, I want us to dig down, into a verse from today’s second reading; but I also want us to step back, and to consider the big story...

Today’s second reading is from Romans 12. Today’s theme is practical advice about how Christians, members of God’s Church, are to live out our faith together... Paul tells us to “extend hospitality to strangers.” That is, our fellowship is always to be directed *outward*, to be welcoming and inviting...

Paul also writes this: “Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.” Live in harmony with one another...

Let’s remember that Paul was writing the congregation in Rome, where the leader of the Roman Empire lived. Like many other imperial cities, ancient Rome was a city of contrasts: A handful of people had *enormous* wealth; at the same time, there were a large number of people living in that city who were slaves, or servants, or labourers, who lived in *abject poverty*, even by the standard of the time. So, there was this great social inequity in Roman society...

To add to these social divisions, some Roman Emperors we thought worthy of devotion as if they were demi-gods— partly “god-like”... Devout Jews and Christians could not participate in the civic obligations to worship the emperor, which made them even more suspect to the Roman society. For the man at the top of the Imperial social class at this time, there was the expectation to offer devotion; to offer worship to him...

So, there are these great social inequities, soaked through Roman society...

In contrast, Christians believe that we are all equal. We are all of the same status before God. God cannot love us all more, and won't love any of us less! All of us are sinners, saved by God's grace... Galatians puts it this way: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus... (3: 28)”

Our equal status before God is shown when we have funerals. Have you noticed, when there is a casket in the Church building at St. Brice's, we cover the casket with a coloured cloth? It's called a “funeral pall.” Modern funeral palls are white – the colour of celebration in the Christian Church – because although we grieve the loss of our loved ones, by the grace of God they are *free*, and alive in Christ for ever...

The funeral palls cover over the casket. Before the English Reformation, rich people tended to get very elaborate funerals; the relatives of poor people simply heard a few prayers offered at the graveside... When the casket is covered up with a funeral pall, we don't know if the casket is the cheapest and the simplest, or the grandest. It doesn't matter! We're all of equal status before the Lord...

Let's look again at that verse from Romans 12: “Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.”

We're not to be haughty, but to associate with the lowly... We aren't meant to strive and compete within the Church family. We don't have pretend that we are especially clever. We definitely do not have a higher status than anyone else, whether we are a bishop or a priest or a janitor...

These words, you see, are not just for the first-century Roman Christians – even though ancient Roman society was soaked with inequities. They are also words through the centuries for the entire Church family, right up to now...

So, I invite you to appreciate with me – we don't need to pretend that we're wiser than we are; or richer; or better educated! We're all equal before the Lord... Let's choose to have rich hospitality – to mingle not just with our friends, but to make *new* friends. That, I suggest, is a glimpse of what heaven will be like... Today's second reading is all practical advice about healthy relationships in the parish...

These are some wonderful words of wisdom from Romans 12, from across the centuries.

However, like appreciating that great artwork, let's step back, and get the whole picture... All of this is in light of what Jesus Christ has done – and who he is. Our relationships with one another are all under the umbrella of responding to the love of Jesus...

As we take in the scriptures, or undertake other devotions, we learn more what God is like. In the Bible, we can be encouraged by seeing great signs of human faithfulness, as well as the terrible consequences of human sin. Let's get to know our scriptures...

It's sometimes said that preachers proclaim what to do, but don't always show us how to do it. I'd like to show 3 resources to you:

1. First, there is a devotional many lay people use here, *Our Daily Bread*. It's just a couple of paragraphs a day, and include a Bible verse.

2. Anglican lectionaries

If we're more ambitious, we might use one of the lectionaries – one of the outlines to be engage with wide sections of the Bible.

If you don't have access to the internet, please see me, and I can show you how to use one of the tables in a prayer book. If you do have access to the internet, please look at the screenshots which are displayed...

- A. anglican.ca
- B. resources
- C. worship
- D. select the date
- E. confirm.

If just starting, we might begin with one of the readings. If we're already doing a reading for a year or two, you might choose 2 readings; and so forth...

3. Third, we can look at the parish website. There's a resource to help us, if we're having trouble keeping up personal devotions:

- A. St. Brice's, North Bay
- B. News
- C. "Living and Active"

If you would rather a text than a video, go to the "Worship" tab, then "Anglicans Reading the Bible."

Now, we don't have to use *any* of these resources. If you happen to use other resources which help you know scripture, well and good. But these can help us, if you need some help. My plea, though, is that in the midst of our busy lives, we set aside at least a little daily time, both to examine the beautiful overarching story of God working through history in the Bible – but also to treasure the details, and to live them out...

"Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are." Thanks be to God.