



Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

August 29, 2021

* *Please stand if you are able*

Prelude

Gathering

WELCOME & LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

Acolyte: May the Holy Spirit unite us in worship, point us toward Jesus Christ, and inspire us to love mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with God. Come, let us worship God.

* CALL TO WORSHIP

Liturgist: Creator God, because you make all that draws forth our praise and the forms in which to express it,

All: we praise you.

Liturgist: Because you make artists of us all, awakening courage to look again at what is taken for granted, grace to share these insights with others, vision to reveal the future already in being,

All: we praise you.

Liturgist: Because you form your Word among us, and in your great work embrace all human experience, even death itself, inspiring our resurrection song,

All: we praise you. Yours is the glory. Amen.

* **All Singing: 5 "Let All Things Now Living"**

- * GOD'S GREETING
- * GOD'S PEOPLE GREETING ONE ANOTHER

* **All Singing: 775 "Across the Lands"**

Children ages 4–7 may come forward for a blessing before they leave for "Children in Worship."

CHILDREN'S BLESSING

Children: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: And also, with you.

Reconciliation

Liturgist: Merciful God, in your gracious presence we confess our sin and the sin of this world.

All: Although Christ is among us as our peace, we are a people divided against ourselves, as we cling to the values of a broken world.

Liturgist: The profit and pleasure we pursue lay waste the land and pollute the seas.

All: The fears and jealousies that we harbor set neighbor against neighbor and nation against nation.

Liturgist: We abuse your good gifts of imagination and freedom, of intellect and reason, and turn them into bonds of oppression.

All: Lord, have mercy upon us; heal and forgive us. Set us free to serve you in the world as agents of reconciling love in Jesus Christ.

Silent Confession and Lament

Liturgist: While it is true that we have sinned, it is a greater truth that we are forgiven through God's love in Jesus Christ. To all who humbly seek the mercy of God we profess in Jesus Christ that our sin is forgiven.

All: Thanks be to God.

* **All Singing: 708 "Here on Jesus Christ I Will Stand"**

GUIDE FOR GRATEFUL LIVING

Liturgist: My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

But do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

James 1:19-25

Proclamation

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

All Singing: 737 “Have Thine Own Way, Lord”
Singing verses 1, 2 and 4

Scripture: Romans 15:14-33

Minister: The Word of the Lord.
All: Thanks be to God.

Sermon: Living the Gospel

* **All Singing: 861 “In Our Lives, Lord, Be Glorified”**

Dedication

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Sending

BENEDICTION

* **All Singing: 938 “My Friends, May You Grow in Grace”**

Postlude: Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus”

Arr. Kenneth Kosche

Worship Leaders

Organist: Dora Diephouse
Pianist: Erin Pacheco
Vocalist: Ginny Carpenter
Vocalist / Violinist: Bethany Keeley-Jonker
Percussionist: Clay Carlson
Minister: Phil Leo

Acolyte: Adrianna DuBois
Liturgist: Priscilla DuBois
Prayer: Scott DuBois

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Text: Romans 15:14-33
Title: Living the Gospel
Date: August 29, 2021
Phil Leo

It's one thing to talk about the gospel; it's another thing to live it. We know this all too well. We live with that gap between *saying* we trust Christ alone and *living* as if we trust Christ alone. We know Jesus used the term “hypocrite” to designate people who say they have faith but live without a shred of faith. And each of us, to varying degrees, has to own up to the inconsistencies in our lives. We love the preaching of the gospel but the living it out part is far less inspiring to us.

We want to take time to get at this gap today not only by considering the gospel of Christ but also what it means to live it. Of course, this takes a lifetime but what does it look like when we not only espouse the gospel of faith in Christ but also live it out in meaningful and significant ways?

At its core, the gospel message is two words: **Christ Alone**. This is what the Apostle Paul works out in his letter to the Roman church. Many of you know this well. Nobody has any standing with God on their own. Even the most religious among us condemn themselves by holding up a standard to which they nor anyone else can actually live up to. The ultra-pure and super-sanctimonious live with the seeds of selfishness and greed and lust just like everyone else. They just work harder to conceal them.

Indeed, the only way any of us find God's favor is by desperately lashing ourselves to Jesus Christ who alone is our perfection and our only hope before God. No amount of words or service or money or sacrifice or good behavior or even church attendance can weigh the scales in our favor when it comes to God. *The gospel message is that our singular hope is Jesus Christ. He alone is our saving grace. He alone is our future.*

Look at VERSE 15 – When Paul says: **“I have written you quite boldly on some points”** this is the MAIN POINT he's been writing about. His description of “quite boldly” is almost an understatement because the message of CHRIST ALONE is one for which Paul was willing to give his life. He's not just parroting what he's heard. Paul actually tried to live this gospel of Christ alone.

In a striking phrase, he says (v. 17): **“I glory in Christ Jesus, in my service to God.”** Take that in for a minute. It means that his glory isn't found in human accomplishment or common treasure. He doesn't get his ego stroked by reputation or position. He's not looking for the kudos so many in this world crave. Paul says that because of the gospel message, he glories only in Jesus Christ as he serves God. Jesus Christ is his highest priority. Everything in his life and all that he's about centers in the first place around Jesus Christ who is his salvation. Paul doesn't just pay lip service to the gospel message. He lives it in as many ways as he can. By listening to him in Romans 15, we'll discover key ways that the gospel of CHRIST ALONE is lived out every single day.

Living the gospel means less “me-talk” and more “Jesus-talk”. Somebody who can only talk about himself/herself likely does this because he/she is their primary point of reference. It doesn't matter what the topic of conversation is, this person is only able to connect the subject at hand to himself/herself. He/she is unable to see the world from a different perspective because he/she is actually the center of the universe. It's all about “me, me, me.”

But living the gospel means that we have an entirely different center point: Jesus Christ. We increasingly view the world from the perspective of his priorities and principles. Our conversation is then filled less and less with “me-talk” and more and more with Jesus-talk. This doesn't mean every single conversation we ever have is a “Jesus-conversation”. Instead, it means that every time we have to choose a reference point, we choose Jesus Christ instead of ourselves. Put practically, every time we face the choice to talk about ourselves and our accomplishments or to speak of Christ and his work through us, we will choose to speak of Jesus Christ in the first place and his saving work in us and through us.

Read Romans 15:18 again: “I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done.” Because Paul glories in Christ alone (and not himself), he can only put Jesus Christ in the first place when it comes to talking about his ministry. Paul's starting place is Jesus Christ because he knows that there is no Paul, and there are no lasting accomplishments apart from Jesus Christ. So, his speech isn't self-orientated but Christ-orientated. He doesn't venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through him.

A simple measure for LIVING THE GOSPEL the amount of “me-talk” versus “Jesus-talk” we engage in. Again, this doesn't necessarily mean that the more “Jesus conversations” we have, the more we live the gospel. There isn't any contest going on to see who can talk about Jesus the most! *Instead, there's a basic perspective revealed in our speech.* It's obvious whether Jesus is the center-point of our world view or not. In subtle but significant ways, it's obvious whether or not we seek to hog the spotlight of our lives or if we gladly give the spotlight to Jesus because he deserves it. Either Jesus Christ is the main Accomplisher in your life, or YOU are and it's not difficult to tell who is just by listening to your talk.

Living the gospel means less self-service and more self-sacrifice. If we live with confidence in CHRIST ALONE, then our lives conform to his pattern of **self-denial** and **sacrificial love.** **It's dying and rising.** This is very basic to the gospel and to living it out. But it's also a hard pill to swallow. We live in a culture awash with the “me, me, me” mentality. It's easy to put ourselves on public display so that more viewers can see that the world really does revolve around me.

I once read a news story about one of the husbands from one of the “Real Housewives” reality TV show who committed suicide. No note was written which left pundits to speculate as to why this man killed himself. Apparently, this husband was distraught about having his impending divorce to his wife played out on television. Before he died, he reportedly told a friend: “Why can't we do this off the show?”

Maybe this man had hit the saturation point of a life that had been soaked in greed and narcissism. Maybe he discovered that, as good as a life about “me, me, me” looks, it’s terribly dissatisfying and empty. Maybe he concluded that the only way to escape the train-wreck of where selfishness was bringing him, was to end his own life before it was too late. Whatever the case, this tragedy is indicative of what happens in a culture that promotes and profits from the cult of “me, myself, and I”.

To live the gospel of CHRIST ALONE means that we increasingly leave behind our penchant for serving ourselves and take up the difficult work of serving others. This pattern is reflected in the Apostle Paul’s ministry when he tells his hearers (v. 25) that, *though he wanted badly to visit Rome, he had to first deliver the collection he’s been taking for the poor and persecuted church in Jerusalem*. He had been working on this project in every city he visited. It didn’t matter if he ran into wealthy or very poor Christians, the Apostle Paul asked everyone the same question: “Would you be willing to take up a collection for the church in Jerusalem?” Paul specifically mentions (v. 26) the churches in Macedonia and Achaia which had many members who lived in extreme poverty. But these Christians gave out of their poverty and Paul says (v. 27) that “they were pleased to do it”.

The only way this makes sense is when the gospel of CHRIST ALONE is lived out. When believers glory in Christ above every other name, they willingly let go of everything else if it means service in his name. To glory in Christ means to selflessly serve others with our gifts and time and resources because it fits the pattern of Jesus Christ. We leave behind selfishness and greed and embrace giving of ourselves in as many ways as we can.

Jane Addams grew up in the late 19th century as a child of privilege and wealth. Her father, John Addams, was a wealthy businessman who later became a state senator in Illinois. Abraham Lincoln considered him a close, personal friend. When John Addams died, Jane inherited a fortune. She used the money to attend a prestigious women’s college and travel around Europe.

But one day she had a dream about a place where poor immigrant families could stay, get an education, and find resources to stabilize their families. Jane did nothing about that dream until she watched a bullfight in Spain. Her friends were horrified at the gore and brutality, but Jane found herself unmoved and even attracted to the spectacle. She decided that her love of this world trumped her love for the poor. Jane Addams wanted to get back to the principles and priorities of Jesus Christ, so she left her life of privilege and went to live with the poor of Chicago. The rest is history. Eventually, Hull House became a 13-building complex and gained a world-wide reputation as a ministry which dispensed both justice and mercy.

Jane Addam’s life fits the pattern of Jesus. It fits the pattern of one who sought to live the gospel instead of just talk about it. Sacrifice was part of it for Jane Addams. She could see no other way. She could not hold onto the values of this world and live sacrificially at the same time. She had to give up what most people in this world would consider to have been the ideal life.

This same pattern must characterize our lives. We can't try to hold onto what matters to this world and what matters to Jesus at the same time. It doesn't work that way because, as Jesus taught, we end up losing our very lives. The ones who want to save their lives must lose them. That's the way of self-sacrifice. That's how we live the gospel.

What are the rhythms of dying and rising for you?

Living the gospel means less worry and more prayer. To glory in Jesus Christ is to have the utmost confidence in him. Worry betrays this. It reveals very little confidence in Christ. Worry is the opposite of prayer. When we pray, we lay before the Lord our challenges, our needs, and our joys. When we worry, we don't pray. Instead, we hold our challenges squarely in our hands. We refuse to let go and trust Christ. We refuse to yield to his way and his provision because we are locked into our way and our provision. But living the gospel means that our prayers increase, and our worries decrease. That's the trajectory of a life lived in Jesus Christ.

Paul prays (Romans 15:30): *"I urge you, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me."* By asking the church at Rome to pray for him, he demonstrates what it means to actually live the gospel. He knew he was going to Jerusalem to deliver the collection he had taken up, but he also knew that his trip there wasn't going to be easy. A prophet named Agabus had told Paul (Acts 21) that he would be arrested by the Jews in that city and turned over to the Roman rulers. Paul didn't know what sort of treatment was ahead of him. He didn't even know if he would survive his trip to Jerusalem. He writes (v. 31): "Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea." Worry and fear were real options for the Apostle but it's clear that his confidence was IN CHRIST ALONE. So, Paul prays, and he invites others to pray for him because he is certain that his future rests only in Jesus Christ no matter which circumstances presented themselves. Paul worried less and prayed more.

Worry and stress and fear are a part of life. Everybody lives with uncertainty and stuff that's out of their control. But living the gospel means that these things are NOT our master. Instead, we have a Lord and Savior to whom we can bring all of our troubles. Those familiar words from Philippians 4:6 come to mind: *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."* Peace characterizes the life of somebody who is living the gospel.

What role does prayer play in your living out the gospel?

So how about it? Where is that gap between what you say you believe and how you are actually living the gospel? How willing are you to live in its tension? In what ways do you practice *less me-talk and more Jesus-talk. Less self-service and more sacrificial living. Less worry and more prayer.*

These are a few ways which characterize the life of someone living the gospel. But they all begin with confidence in Christ alone. Amen.