**December 4, 2022 Romans 15:4-13**

**If Peace Begins With Me**

**Scripture:** Romans 15:4-13 NRSV

*(4)For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. (5)May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, (6)so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (7)Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. (8)For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, (9)and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name"; (10)and again he says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people"; (11)and again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him"; (12)and again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope." (13)May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

**Notes:**

1. ***Peace*** might seem like a fairy tale,
   1. Is peace the ***absence*** of ***conflict***?
   2. The foundation of ***peace*** aligns our attitude with Christ.
   3. The foundation of ***peace*** brings about one mind and one voice.
2. The church in Rome allowed disagreements to ***divide*** them.
   1. Paul tells them not to ***judge*** one another.
   2. The ***strong*** look out for those who are ***weak***.
   3. Look out for the ***well***-***being*** of others.
3. Though we may disagree, the ***foundation*** is the same.
   1. One ***mind*** and one ***voice*** are born out of Christlikeness.
   2. God gives us ***endurance*** to be made like Christ.
   3. We become more like Christ, when we ***align*** with Christ.
4. This passage is a call to be more like ***Christ***.
   1. Look on ***others*** the way Christ looks upon them.
   2. We are called to be like ***Christ***.
   3. Where do we need to be reminded of our ***foundation*** and ***identity*** in Christ?
5. We have deep ***feelings*** about important issues.
   1. What do I need to change in my life to be a ***peacemaker***?”
   2. Where do we need to extend ***grace*** and ***mercy***?
   3. Do the ***hard*** ***work*** of walking through conflict with those who think differently.

**Script:**

We live in a very disturbing world. I, many times, see things happening around me and I do not know how to react. Quarrels between friends, should I step in and try to mediate? Factions working against the other factions trying to get what they want accomplished. All we need to do is look at our political system; how the two major political parties are constantly bickering; how when the power shifts from one party to another, they quickly undo what was done by the other, even when it seemed to be working. The longer we go the more we catch ourselves siding with one group or the other.

Have you ever caught yourself in this predicament? Have you ever been frustrated by chaos in our world? Have you ever found yourself being caught up in the turmoil? Maybe even taking sides in the midst of this turmoil? Have you ever wondered if peace is possible? Have you ever wondered where peace may be found?

Well today we will be looking at Romans 15:4-13, and we will be looking for answers to these questions, as well as others; as we share in this second Sunday of Advent; the Sunday of Peace.

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In our contentious world of violence and discord, peace might seem like a fairy tale, especially the type of peace that gives us one voice and one mind, as Paul says in this Romans text. This seems impossible given the current state of things, where everything feels fragile or torn and conflict seems to reside just under the surface. But today is the Sunday in Advent when we light the peace candle. When we reflect on the peace of Christ and the possibility for peace in our world. We are left with questions about peace: Is peace possible? And is peace the absence of conflict, or is it something else entirely?

Romans 15 lays out instructions on how we ought to live with one another. Those who are strong bear with the failings of the weak. We care for our neighbors. We are to have the same attitude as Christ toward one another. These line up well with an idea of living at peace with others.

But the foundation of peace, this foundation of learning to live in community with one another, isn’t a removal of conflict, never approaching difficult topics or conversations, never having hard words with each other. Instead, the foundation is Christ. Aligning one’s attitude with Christ is what brings about one mind and one voice with which to glorify God.

This season is one when we talk about peace on earth often, but if Romans 15 is any indication, then it is true what the songwriters say about peace beginning with us. This isn’t about winning an argument or avoiding an argument. It is about what it means to build a foundation on Christ, a foundation that ultimately leads to one mind and one voice with those around us.

**The members of the church in Rome were allowing their disagreements to divide them.** In order to fully understand this text in chapter 15, it’s important to explore the context of Romans 14. Paul is speaking about the eating practices of Christians, talking about how some who have a strong faith eat meat while those with weaker faith eat only vegetables.

At the time, the meat that was offered to gods in worship would then be served in restaurants. This is likely the type of meat that Paul is talking about. He brings up this same issue in 1 Corinthians 8 as well, where he says he doesn’t see an issue with eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols because idols are nothing, but he is also careful to say he will not be a stumbling block to those who disagree with him.

The debate seems to be that some Christians view the meat as no problem, and not a hindrance to their faith, whereas others view it as equal to idol worship. Those on either side of this argument were judging the other on what was the correct way to worship God. Paul tells them not to judge one another, imploring them not to create a stumbling block for others with their choices.

Chapter 15 then moves into this idea that those who are strong look out for the well-being of those who are weak. The focus isn’t on what is best for me and my relationship with Christ (whether I can eat meat), but on what is good for our neighbors, what builds up the community. This is a high emphasis on submission and selflessness. To live in community means looking out for the well-being of others. Living in community at times means putting aside our own desires in order to build up the community. This doesn’t mean everyone agrees. There was clearly a lot of disagreement.

**Though the community of faith disagrees, the foundation is the same.** The one mind and one voice are born out of Christlikeness. Christ is the example of love, of compassion, of caring for one another, of submission, of sacrifice, and of selflessness. As we grow in our discipleship, God gives us the endurance and encouragement to be made more like Christ, thus exhibiting the qualities of Christ.

The idea of “one mind and one voice” also seems to parallel or connect with Ephesians 4:5, where Paul talks about one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. The people are united not because they agree on everything but because they have the same foundation.

Accepting one another doesn’t happen in a vacuum; we do it because we have been accepted by Christ. We become more like Christ, and thus we align ourselves with the mind of Christ. Christ accepts us where we are, feeble faith and all, so we are to accept one another, feeble faith and all.

Paul again emphasizes Jesus’s servanthood. Jesus became a servant so that God might be glorified. Therefore, we become servants because we see Christ’s example of servanthood, and our lives lived in unity with one another lead to God being glorified.

**This passage is a call to be more like Christ.** These are harsh words to the church, calling them to something greater. He calls out their favoritism and tells them to learn to elevate one another. He calls out their judgmentalism and tells them to embrace everyone. He calls out their exclusionary systems and tells them to look upon others the way Christ looks upon them.

It would be easy to look at peace in a community as the absence of conflict. Paul isn’t avoiding conflict or confrontation because he knows that the way to true peace in community is to confront the things that are keeping the community of faith from looking like Jesus. The way to live in community with one another is not to ignore the issues but to be reminded of who we are called to be like.

This is not a call to exclusionary practices but a reminder that because you are part of this, this is who we are: like Christ. Paul is reminding the faith community of the mercy and grace Christ showed them that they should be showing one another.

Where in our community do we need to be confronted with our judgmentalism, favoritism, or exclusionary practices? Where do we need to be reminded of our foundation and identity in Christ? When have we ignored conflict for the sake of a false sense of peace, instead of doing the hard work of holiness that asks us to examine our own hearts? Where do we need to submit, be selfless, and surrender to the good of the community? Where do we need to look like servant Jesus? If peace in the community begins with me, where do I need to allow my heart to be transformed, so that I might be a person of peace?

Communities—even communities of faith—are full of people with differing opinions. We have deep feelings about important issues. It would be easy for us to think or say that being quiet will bring peace, but Paul has laid out a different way for us. He speaks harsh words, but his words are ultimately a call to remember who we are. He didn’t ignore the conflict; he waded right into it, and said, “Remember we are to be like Christ.”

We live in days of seemingly extreme division, and it would be a mistake to ignore it. Instead we need to ask, “If peace on earth begins with me, what do I need to change in my life to be a peacemaker?” If God has extended grace and mercy to us, where do we need to extend grace and mercy? This isn’t about a list of things we should and shouldn’t do. This is a call to look at the person of Jesus This is a call to look at who we are supposed to be in the world. This is a call to be people who are like Christ.

So may we examine our hearts and do the hard work of walking through conflict with those who think differently, so that we might find a deep and wide community of faith, so that we might find a deep and wide community of peace, so that we might find a deep and wide community of Christ with one voice glorifying God.