**August 6, 2023 Romans 16:1-16**

***Bigger Than Life***

**Scripture:** *Romans 16:1-16 NRSV*

*(1)I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, (2)so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well. (3)Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, (4)and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. (5)Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ. (6)Greet Mary, who has worked very hard among you. (7)Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. (8)Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. (9)Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. (10)Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. (11)Greet my relative Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. (12)Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. (13)Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; and greet his mother--a mother to me also. (14)Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters who are with them. (15)Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. (16)Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.*

**Notes:**

1. God calls every disciple of Christ to get involved in making ***disciples***.
   1. Paul followed Christ’s ***example***.
   2. Paul ***encouraged*** believers
2. Paul built a ***network*** of workers and supporters.
   1. Each person mentioned were ***disciples*** of Christ through Paul.
   2. He trained and left lay ***leaders*** in charge of these communities
   3. Paul ***welcomed*** everyone who showed an interest in God’s kingdom.
3. Every church must provide a ***welcoming*** and ***nurturing*** environment
   1. ***Share*** with them the love of Jesus;
   2. ***Testify*** to what the Lord has done in our life;
   3. ***Encourage*** them to enter the same type of relationship with Jesus.
4. The Holy Spirit draws those who need Christ through ***prevenient*** grace
   1. He uses each of us, to ***instruct*** them so they come to know Christ.
   2. Learn and grow in ***faith*** through the teaching of scriptures.
   3. Christ’s disciples must be ***responsible*** for leading people into the faith.
5. Jesus ***challenges*** us today with the Great Commission.
   1. He challenges us to ***travel*** all over the world.
   2. He challenges us to make ***disciples*** for Jesus.
   3. He challenges us to ***Baptize*** all who believe in the name of Jesus.
   4. He challenges us to ***teach*** converts to obey everything he commanded.
   5. He challenges us to remain **faithful**.
   6. Each of these challenges is meant for ***All*** ***Who*** ***Believe***.

**Script:**

How do we get to the moon? If I were to ask this question 60 years ago, we would say “I do not know.” But in the past 60 years we have made a lot of progress in space travel and we have even had astronauts landing on the moon; walking around, driving vehicles on the surface and returning safely. There is even talk that we could one day have commercial flights to the moon. As a kid I was enthralled by all of this discussion and even dreamt that maybe one day I would be able to travel into space.

So, to answer the question I asked earlier; in order for us to get to the moon, we must work off the discoveries and scientific breakthroughs from generations of scientists and engineers. In the book that accompanies our series on People of Grace, Sam Barber quotes the BBC in saying that it took over 400,000 people from JFK through Neil Armstrong to land the first man on the moon and make it possible for him to walk there and return home safely.

Over the next 6-7 weeks we will be looking at what it takes to be a People of Grace and what it takes to become a Disciple of Jesus Christ. Many of us have been serving the Lord for many years and we still become a little apprehensive when discipleship is mentioned. But discipleship is merely learning from those who have gone before us and teaching those who come behind us. Much like those who worked tirelessly to Get Neil Armstrong onto the moon after the challenge of JFK; we must use the information that has been learned in the past and teach those who come behind us. So today I would like to take a look at our sermon passage Romans 16:1-16 and see what this has to do with becoming a disciple of Christ and making disciples of others. Paul writes to the Romans:

*(1)I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, (2)so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well. (3)Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, (4)and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. (5)Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ. (6)Greet Mary, who has worked very hard among you. (7)Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. (8)Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. (9)Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. (10)Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. (11)Greet my relative Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. (12)Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. (13)Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; and greet his mother--a mother to me also. (14)Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters who are with them. (15)Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. (16)Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you. Romans 16:1-16 NRSV*

God calls every disciple of Christ to get involved in making disciples just as Paul did. For the last two thousand years, the Christian church has regarded Paul as one of the greatest servants of Christ in church history. To most, he was bigger than life. Paul was a traveling missionary giant. Paul followed Christ’s example. He was an exceptional evangelist who took the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. He wrote thirteen books of the New Testament, composing nearly one-fourth of its content. And in his own words to Timothy, he “*fought the good fight, . . . finished the race, . . . [and] kept the faith*” (2 Tim. 4:7). Paul died as a martyr for the faith and received the “*crown of righteousness*” (v. 8) that he spoke of. Paul encouraged believers to “*follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ*” (1 Cor. 11:1).

Christ invested personally in his disciples. He invested much of his attention in the three: Peter, James, and John (Matt. 17:1). He invested heavily in the Twelve: all of his apostles (10:2-4). He invested in the seventy-two (Luke 10:1). Paul was not a lone individual who ministered solo; he built a network of workers and supporters in every local church in order to multiply his ministry. Paul invested in fellow believers at every level of ministry.

Romans 16:1-15 names a few of the ordinary disciples who assisted Paul; people who supported his ministry, and got involved in building God’s kingdom through discipleship in local churches. There were people like Pricilla and Aquila, they preached and taught alongside Paul vv. 3, 6, 9 Others offered their homes as meeting places for the church (v. 5) which could be very risky. Some befriended Paul and worked hard behind the scenes (vv. 5, 8, 12). There were those who suffered in prison with Paul (v. 7). Some served as examples of Christ’s transforming power (v. 10) and some nurtured Paul as a family member (vv. 13-14).

Each of the people mentioned were disciples of Christ through the ministry of Paul. Paul’s ministry flourished in local communities of faith. Communities that he started, as well as faith communities that he nurtured because he trained and left lay leaders in charge of these communities when he moved to his next assignment. Paul welcomed everyone who showed an interest in God’s kingdom.

The church today cannot afford to be any different. Every community of faith every church must provide a welcoming and nurturing environment to everyone who visits. We must be welcoming to those who enter into our fellowship. We must share with them the love of Jesus. We must testify to what the Lord has done in our life and how He has changed us from what we once were to what he is making us to be. And, we must encourage them to enter to the same type of relationship with our Lord.

The Holy Spirit draws those who need Christ, through prevenient grace, into individuals who know Christ. He uses each of us, if we do what we are asked to do by the Holy Spirit, to enter into a relationship with them, instructing them so they will come to know Christ because they know us. It is in this effort the Spirit draws them in so that they also can share the gospel message with others.

This is the fundamentals of disciple making. Which is what we have been called to do, when Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” Matthew 28:19 NRSV. But Jesus didn’t stop with that. He doesn’t want us to stop at being disciples and making converts. Jesus goes on to say before ascending into heaven, “… teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:20 NRSV. We are to continue to learn and grow in our faith through the teaching of the scriptures.

That is our calling, that is our mission, that is our task while we continue to wait for His return. Christ’s disciples must accept responsibility for nurturing individuals into the faith and then helping them grow in grace until they become mature believers. We must be by their side and as they struggle with difficult questions and ideas, encourage them to dig deeper into the word in order to find the answers that give them the understanding they need to become disciple makers themselves.

Just before Jesus left his disciples to return to his Father, He challenged them as well as us today with the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). He spent more than three years training them to be His disciples, and now just before leaving them to return to His father in heaven, He challenges them to travel all over the place. He challenges them to make disciples for Jesus. He challenges them to Baptize all who confess their belief in the name of Jesus. He challenges them to teach these converts to obey everything that Jesus had commanded. And he challenged them to remain faithful until the day that he will return to take us to be with Him.

Jesus did not address his command to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (vv. 19-20) only to those called into full-time Christian service. He addressed it to every believer from that day to today. Jesus assists us in fulfilling his command in two important ways: he gives us a nurturing community of faith within which to serve, and he gives us his presence to guide us every step of the way (v. 20).

Over the next six weeks we will be working through the book “***A People of Grace: Becoming Disciples Together***” by South Central Ohio District Superintendent, Sam Barber. The books are found out in the foyer on the table. Please take one and each week we will work through one chapter at a time beginning with Chapter 1, “***The Reach of Grace: For God So Loved the World***”. I encourage you to be here for each week and each chapter.

And now receive the benediction, “***The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace***. (Numbers 6:24-27 NRSV)