

1.19.20**Welcome One Another****Romans 15.4-14****Doug Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church**

This is the weekend our nation honors the life, legacy, and work of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He was a Baptist pastor who devoted his life and ultimately had it taken from him in the fight for racial equality and justice in this country. While some progress has been made since his death in 1968, it's sad that attitudes and issues around race from the personal to the systemic level are still far from the beloved community that God desires for all people. Division between people is not what the Kingdom of Heaven is about. In and through Christ, God is about bringing people together and knocking down the dividing walls and divisions that human beings have used to differentiate themselves from other people throughout history; divisions of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, class and whatever other categories humans continue to use to demean, exclude, enslave, attack, conquer, or even exterminate others.

The Apostle Paul was committed to helping to bridge the significant division that existed between Jews and other nations. The Letter to the Romans provides Paul's most comprehensive summary of the human condition and of God's actions in history on our behalf, especially in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul was a Jew. He had been raised and trained as a Pharisee and he knew the Hebrew Bible incredibly well. He was an exceptionally intelligent and energetic person. After his life-changing encounter with the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul spent the rest of his life telling others about what God had done not only in his life, but more importantly how in the death and resurrection of Jesus, God had fulfilled the hopes not only of the Jews, as shocking and unexpected as a crucified Messiah was to those who were Jewish, but also the hopes of the nations by opening the door to relationship with the Merciful God who had triumphed over the powers of darkness and all the false idols that people worshiped and to which they gave devotion.

In other words, in and through King Jesus, Jews no longer needed to separate themselves from the nations, but all people could be united in faith and community through mutual loyalty and faithfulness to the Messiah. This was a dangerous religious message for Paul to share as he often did in synagogues, because there were some who shared his Jewish faith who thought he was betraying the traditions and practices

of his religion. This was a dangerous political message for Paul to share with citizens of the Roman Empire because he was saying King Jesus was the one who deserved ultimate worship and loyalty and not Caesar.

Toward the conclusion of his letter to the Romans Paul summarizes one final time how what was written in the scriptures reveals that God's desire and plan all along was for all people **living in harmony with one another glorifying the God** and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who is the reason all people now can have and live **in hope**.

Romans 15.4-14 (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**.

¹⁴ I myself feel confident about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and **able to instruct one another**."

This passage from near the end of Romans begins and ends with **hope**. Hope is necessary for human beings to thrive. My mentor in seminary liked to say, *"I used to think hope was the icing on the cake. I've lived long enough to learn hope is the cake."* Paul wrote Romans in the year 57 and in social and political terms it wasn't a time of great hope. The Roman Emperor Claudius had been poisoned three years before and

his 17-year-old great nephew Nero, young and not very stable, had been named Emperor. Eleven years after Romans was written, in the year 68 AD, after a turbulent 13-year reign, the Roman senate ran out of patience and declared Nero a public enemy. Nero fled and at the age of 30 took his own life. Under the rule of Nero's Rome, millions of people – most women, children, the poor, and those who had been conquered in battle and enslaved had little reason for hope or encouragement. It's into this climate that Paul is sharing his message about Christ.

As we continue our **“One Another”** series, today's passage includes three of them: **live in harmony with one another (v.5)** which we touched on briefly last week, **welcome one another (v.7)**, and **instruct one another (v.14)**. Today our primary focus is **Romans 15:7, “Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”**

Paul is explaining how **The Gospel is for Jews and Non-Jews Alike**. Aware of the accusations that he wasn't true to the traditions of his faith, Paul grounds his message in the scriptures. Paul starts with a significant principle concerning the purpose of the scriptures: **For everything that was written in the past was written for our instruction to teach us**. The scriptures serve to give believers **“steadfastness and endurance in the face of adversities”** and encouragement so that they might **“keep on having hope”**; (see Romans 5:3–5). Remember, most people in the first century would not have been able to read and would not have had access to scrolls of scripture. Today we have access to the scriptures and most of us can read, the question for us is do we choose to do it. Paul would encourage us to do so because in the pages of the Bible we're provided with **“steadfastness and endurance in the face of adversities”** and encouragement so that we might **“keep on having hope.”**

After telling them that the scriptures were written with this purpose, in verses 5 and 6 **Paul prays for the church**. **“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.”**

Then in verse 7 he tells them **“Welcome or Accept one another (NIV), just as Christ accepted you for the glory of God.”** Another way of expressing verses 7 is,

“Take each other as partners, in the same way also that the Anointed One took you as partners.” **Paul is telling them the most appropriate way to deal with differences of opinion among peers. This is the end of a section of Romans that began at the start of chapter 14.** We’re to welcome others especially those who may be different than ourselves just as Christ has welcomed us. **How has Christ welcomed us – generously, graciously, with kindness and unconditional love.** Reading the Gospels we see Jesus interacting with all kinds of people –Jews, Samaritans, Romans, Greeks, the rich, the poor, and Jesus’ message to all of them while always personal is a variation of, *“Turn from your previous ways of thinking, living, seeing the world and other people and what is of ultimate value, and come, follow me in the way of the kingdom of heaven.”* Paul says we’re to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us **for the glory of God.**

Paul’s Goal is the Glory of God. Paul’s goal is not merely good human relationships, but God-glorifying, Christ-exalting human relationships. The aim of Christ and his apostle is to display the glory of God — the beauty of God, the greatness of God. Verses 6 and 7 both refer to the glory of God.

It’s helpful to know that when Paul was writing Romans, he wasn’t writing to a single congregation, like when he was writing to the church in Corinth. In Rome, there would have been numerous small churches scattered about the city. Some of them were based on nationality or language; some of them would have been Jewish and some Gentile. They would have spoken Greek with different accents, sung different songs, and had some of their own worship practices or approaches. He wants the members of the Roman churches to respect one another across these differences because the unity of the Messiah’s people across traditional divisions is part of the way that the followers of Jesus will be a sign of his universal rule that glorifies God.

As Christians today, we need to be thinking about how we personally and as a congregation welcome other people and we need to be reflecting on how we interact with other churches so that we do so in a way that God is glorified.

Paul is saying to these churches composed of different nationalities, Jewish congregations and Gentile congregations: ***“God has done what he always said he would, and this is what it means today.”*** *With the crucifixion and resurrection of*

Jesus and the gift of the Spirit- God has put forth Jesus the Messiah as the means of establishing a new reality, a single family whose sins are forgiven, a Jewish-Gentile covenant family as God promised to Abraham. Everyone who believes in, has faith in the one who raised Jesus from the dead are now full members in the new covenant. This is a fresh act of grace, received by faith.”

So, let me review because I know we’re covering a lot. Paul is saying in Romans 15 that the steadfast endurance, encouragement and hope we receive from the Scriptures (v. 4) come ultimately from God (v. 5), the Author of the Scriptures. Paul prayed that God would give his readers a spirit of unity as they follow Christ Jesus. The ultimate purpose of this unity was that with one heart and mouth (a unity of inward feeling and outward expression) they would “*keep on glorifying*” the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3 have the same wording about God). **The glory of God is the ultimate purpose of Christians individually and of the church corporately** (Rom. 15:7; 1 Cor. 6:20; 2 Thessalonians. 1:12).

Since the goal of interpersonal relationships among Christians is a unified glorying of God, Paul concluded his commands ***with Welcome or Accept one another (the tense is literally “keep on accepting or receiving one another”)*** signaling this is an ongoing process. Significantly this is the same command Paul gave the strong Christians when he opened this entire discussion in Romans 14:1, ***“Welcome those who are weak in faith (or conviction), but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions.”*** **The Model of welcome and acceptance for Christians, is always the Lord Jesus, who welcomed and accepted us.** The Lord received believers when we were not only “*weak*” or “*powerless*” (Romans 5:6) but also “*ungodly*” (5:6), “*sinner*s” (5:8), and “*enemies*” (5:10). If the Lord welcomed us when we were like that, certainly Christians can receive others who differ with us on nonessential matters. Jesus Christ received them and us so that we all can bring praise to God which is the purpose of Christian unity (15:6). Paul insisted in letter after letter, **on the unity of the church across all traditional boundaries.**

15:8–12. Having pointed to the Lord Jesus as the Model for Christians, Paul moves on in verses 8-12 to describe **Jesus’ ministry and its objectives**: Christ became a servant of the Jews. Jesus was born a Jew as God’s Messiah for Israel. **God**

had two objectives to accomplish through Jesus' ministry. The first was to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs of Israel (9:4–5). **God's second objective in Christ's ministry was that the Gentiles may glorify God for His mercy.** God had made covenants with Israel (9:4), not with the Gentiles. Any spiritual blessings that come to the Gentiles spring from the mercy of God. God's purpose was to bless the Gentiles through the Lord Jesus as their Messiah and through His covenants with Israel (Gen. 12:3; John 4:22).

Paul says God's two purposes in the ministry of Christ are now being achieved and the church is being formed of both Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:14–22). And it will be achieved in the future when Israel becomes head of the nations and a means of blessing to everyone (Deut. 30:1–10). To demonstrate the validity of his statement concerning the ministry of Christ and its purposes, particularly the one relating to Gentiles, the Apostle **Paul quotes four passages** from the Hebrew Bible. **Significantly these quotations are taken from all three divisions of the Old Testament— “the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms” —and from three great Jewish heroes: Moses, David, and Isaiah.** The first quotation (Rom. 15:9) is from David's song of deliverance (2 Sam. 22:50; Ps. 18:49); the second (Rom. 15:10), from Moses' valedictory song to the people of Israel (Deut. 32:43); the third (Rom. 15:11), from both the shortest and the middle chapter of the Bible (**Psalm 117:1**); and the fourth (Rom. 15:12), from Isaiah's messianic prophecy about the peaceable kingdom (Isa. 11:10, “On that day *the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.*”)

A progression of thought can be traced through the four quotations. In the first, David praised God among the Gentiles (Rom. 15:9); in the second, Moses exhorted the Gentiles, Rejoice ... with His people (v. 10); in the third the psalmist commanded the Gentiles to praise the Lord (v. 11; see v. 7); and in the fourth, Isaiah predicted that the Gentiles will live under the rule of the Root of Jesse (the Messiah) and they will hope in Him (v. 12). Paul's point is that the scriptures saw the nations being blessed by God's fulfilling His covenantal promises to His people Israel.

The result of what God has now done in Christ is hope, joy, peace, believing, and the power of the Holy Spirit for all who believe – whether Jew or

Gentile, whoever anyone is. This is good news and we're to instruct one another about it.

We're called to welcome and accept others just as Christ has welcomed us – for the glory of God.

Blessing: Romans 15:13, "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**."

Invitation Romans 10:9 declares, *"If you profess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. According to Romans 15:3, 7, what is the essential motivation for the lifestyle of putting others first?
2. Why is accepting and welcoming other people an important part of faithfully following Christ?
3. As you have matured in your faith, how has your sensitivity to the consciences and experiences of other Christians changed?
4. What can you do to be more accepting and welcoming of others who may be different than yourself?
5. How does Paul describe Christ's ministry to Jews and Gentiles or the nations (15:8–13)?
6. Romans 15:13 describes several characteristics of both the Christian life and the church (hope, joy, peace, believing, the power of the Holy Spirit). How would obeying Paul's instructions in Romans 15:4-14 contribute to creating this kind of life and church?

A Litany in Honor of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Voice 1: "Martin Luther King Jr. had a dream that one day there would be equality and unity among all races. There are many Bible verses that affirm his dream. Every human being is made in the image of God. Showing respect toward every person shows respect for God.

Voice 2: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (Gen. 1:27)

All: And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." (Luke 10:27)

Voice 1: Every human being has worth and dignity in the sight of God.

All: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Voice 2: So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." (Acts 10:34-35) And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place. (Acts 17:26)

All: But no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. (James 3:8-9)

Voice 1: Racism is a sin of pride. The Bible is clear that pride and arrogance are sins. We should never view ourselves as being superior to any other person for any reason.

"The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate." (Prov. 8:13)

All: There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers. (Prov. 6:16-19)

Voice 2: Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished. (Prov. 16:5) Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin. (Prov. 21:4)

All: Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant. (1 Cor. 13:4)

Voice 1: Showing partiality is a sin. "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe." (Deut. 10:17)

All: There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:28)

Voice 2: If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. (James 2:8-9)

Voice 1: We should love our neighbor as ourselves. Loving our neighbor as ourselves is one of the two great commandments, according to Jesus (Matt. 22:39). Racism always insults our brothers and sisters and causes us to commit murder in our hearts. Racism has also tragically led to the abuse and murder of millions of God's image-bearers throughout history.

All: Those who say, "I love God," and hates their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. (1 John 4:20 NRSV)

Voice 1: Christians should always seek the unity of the church. Racism has been present throughout history and has always threatened the unity of the church. The good news of Jesus Christ entails a new level of inclusivity and unity that culminates in a richly diverse congregation of saints worshiping together before the Lamb of God.

Voice 2: And Peter said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean." (Acts 10:28) But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

All: For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility. (Eph. 2:13-14)

Voice 1: After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands. (Rev. 7:9)

Voice 2: Racism is a violation of the two great commandments. Whenever we harm anyone in thought or deed, we are sinning against God and our neighbor.

Voice 1: Racism, like all sin, is not merely sinful when we actively participate, but also when we turn a blind eye to wrongs being committed or choose not to care.

Even if racism has little effect on some of us personally, many brothers and sisters in Christ are being harmed and are asking for our love, support and attention.

All: May Christ followers around the world be known for our love, unity, impartiality, graciousness, kindness, and care for every human being.

A Prayer by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Thou Eternal God, out of whose absolute power and infinite intelligence the whole universe has come into being, we humbly confess that we have not loved thee with our hearts, souls and minds, and we have not loved our neighbors as Christ loved us. We have all too often lived by our own selfish impulses rather than by the life of sacrificial love as revealed by Christ. We often give in order to receive. We love our friends and hate our enemies. We go the first mile but dare not travel the second. We forgive but dare not forget. And so, as we look within ourselves, we are confronted with the appalling fact that the history of our lives is the history of an eternal revolt against you. But thou, O God, have mercy upon us. Forgive us for what we could have been but failed to be. Give us the intelligence to know your will. Give us the courage to do your will. O God, make us willing to do your will, come what may. Increase the number of persons of good will and moral sensitivity. Give us renewed confidence in nonviolence and the way of love as taught by Christ. In the name and spirit of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Holy God. Today, we remember Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s struggle for equality, justice, and dignity for African Americans that inspired so many other reform movements that seek to highlight the plight of the oppressed in society.

We pray that all of those in civil and religious authority be reminded that we all have been created in your image, and that there is an intrinsic dignity in each of us that calls for uplifting every man and woman, young and old.

We pray that your Holy Spirit remind us all that you show no partiality regarding nationality, race, ethnicity, or gender, and to do so is to go against your great commandment of love toward one another.

We pray that the church will not be complicit of injustice by being silent, but that it can rise with a prophetic voice that speaks truth to power and advances the values of your Kingdom. We pray these things in the name of our blessed redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen.