

WELCOME 24th July 2022 – 7 Pentecost '22 C

Romans 12:1-21

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! Can't tell you how much I'm enjoying going through the book of Romans as a family of disciples...*Bible Study Qs are provided to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word & work in your life, then you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m.*

As we move into this week... 'Our thoughts and prayers are with you!' Politicians & news readers, heads of state & your next door neighbour. Whether they believe those things make a difference or not...Christian or not...Those words form a kind of liturgy...a rote ritual set of words used to express condolences or sympathy for loss, grief or tragedy & to offer passive support & sympathy. In too many circumstances they're empty & hollow. They're spoken & nothing happens on the part of the speaker. And the receiver...briefly acknowledged...may be left to struggle on alone.

On the other hand, **Just** *as our bodies have many parts & each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, & we all belong to each other...* The Gospel is a powerful, proactive dynamic word...a sure certain word that changes lives, builds community & transforms all of us creating a bond of love that lasts forever & establishes a fellowship stronger than any on earth.

In being claimed by Jesus Christ... dying/rising w/ him by baptism into his life death resurrection & rule we are forged into a gospel community...where we become those **who** "worship God, serve his kingdom's mission in the world & encourage one another, build one another up in faith, pray with & for one another, learn from & teach one another, and set for one another examples to follow, challenges to take up, & urgent tasks to perform." – NT Wright

We'll explore & experience that together...Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Heavenly Father, Maker of heaven and earth, we gather in your name by your Spirit as living sacrifices, to offer you our worship & thanksgiving, our praise & our prayers...a small measure returned for your abundant grace

Come among us, living Lord & by the power of your Holy Spirit, transform our hearts & minds so we are strengthened by your presence, hear your voice, know your will, & live obediently conformed to your way.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour...the only hope for the world...Amen.

Let's hear God's word

FAITH CHAT:

1. When have you felt most alone or disconnected from other people? Why was that?
2. Share a time when the Christian community was absolutely essential to your life.
3. If Living Water Fellowship ceased to exist, do you think the people of Wagga Wagga would notice? Would they care? What would be different or lost?

7 PENTECOST '22 C – OPERATION GOSPEL: GOSPEL COMMUNITY

A man was walking around a construction site. He watched for a while & then called to one of the workers, “What are you doing?” The worker glanced over his shoulder & said, “I’m a mason. I’m laying stone in a wall.” The man walked further around the site & called out to another labourer, “What are you doing?” The man straightened up from his work, looked the inquirer in the eye & smiled broadly saying, “I’m a mason! I’m building a cathedral.” Two men. Same identity. Same tasks. Difference? The vision of what would result from their effort...a vision that propelled one toward a grand destiny...the other toward a daily paycheck. I’m building a cathedral!

When we get to Rom 12...Paul sees a cathedral being built in the lives of disciples he has not yet met & he lays out 3 phases of the building project that are absolutely essential not only in Rome...but here & everywhere people who call themselves disciples, who propose to live as church, exist. *WHERE THESE 3 AREN'T...* there is no cathedral...there may be Xns...but they aren't what Jesus or Paul or any of our faith ancestors had in mind. Look at what he says...

And so, dear brothers & sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. (In view of God's mercy) Let them be a living & holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behaviour & customs (Do not conform to the pattern) of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. (but be transformed by the renewing of your mind) Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good & pleasing & perfect.

Because of what God has done...in view of God's mercy...because the Father has reconciled you to himself in Christ...because every debt is cancelled & every sin wiped clean...death defeated...hell conquered...declared righteous...the power of sin over you broken...no condemnation...Every facet of life is to be offered to God. Because of his mercy...because he held nothing back to bring you in from darkness & death to life & light eternal...spared not even his own Son...YOU NOW hold nothing back...take all you are & say “Father this is yours.” God doesn't want part of your life. He wants it all. God doesn't want 90 minutes of your week; he wants all 7 days. God wants every part of your life: your finances, your sex life, your work, your hobbies, your hopes dreams aspirations beliefs attitudes & values...your time & relationships, & most of all your affections/passions...that which you desire more than anything.

C.S. Lewis gets it right: **God** cannot bless us unless he **has** us. When we try to keep within us an area for our own, we try to keep an area of death. Therefore, in love, He claims it all. There's no bargaining with Him.

“When we try to keep w/in us an area for our own, we try to keep an area of death.” Imagine...Dr says, “John...that little spot on your scan is a tumor. That's cancer & I'm going to cut it out b/4 it gets bigger.” And I say in reply... “Good catch Doc! But when you cut out that thing that could kill me, remember it's mine & I'd like you to leave me just a little bit for me too ok?” What do we do in response to God's grace? How does God build a cathedral right here? Surrender everything. It's all his. He wants us, all of us. He claims it all. There's no bargaining with Him.

Which is why being *conformed to the pattern of this world...copying the behaviour & customs of this world* is such a disaster...To be conformed/copy this world is to try to make my/your life look like something other than Jesus. If we set our standard as something other than Jesus we have trouble...deadly trouble. I have started using the words **hopes** dreams aspirations beliefs attitudes & values often...It's a way to describe what some authors call your **worldview** – perspective or outlook on life.

It's the set of assumptions we live by...about what's most important, what life is all about, what's best in life...Those things shape & determine who we are & what our lives become. It's how we make decisions...house we buy car we drive raise our kids choose a spouse \$\$\$ holidays...The average person in the West carries around in their heart a culturally not biblically grounded set of assumptions/worldview. *Like what?* God is okay, but keep him to yourself. Follow your heart. Find out what makes you happy, & do that & as long as it doesn't hurt anybody else, it's okay. Your feelings are all that matter. If you've been hurt then we owe you forever.

But author Trevin Wax writes: “**The** great need of the world is a church that offers something other than its own echo.” The world needs the church to show something other than more of the same. The world needs us to be different; to live differently than it does; to offer a model of family that has stood the test & trials of time, to demonstrate patterns of giving, styles of parenting, engagement w/ strangers & presence in our communities that build for others not simply exist for ourselves of swim with the current cultural current. Too many Xns & far too many churches are closed systems ...they exist in their own bubble & never break free... Which is why being *conformed to the pattern of this world...copying the behaviour & customs of this world* is such a disaster...If we set our standard as something other than Jesus we have deadly trouble. *Because of what God has done...in view of God's mercy...Every facet of life is to be offered to God.*

2nd thing Paul says that builds cathedrals... **Just** as our bodies have many parts & each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, & we all belong to each other. Throughout this letter Paul repeats the central truth of the gospel: God chose us in love to be part of his family & live out his character & his

kingdom here on earth. Look at the present tense sense of the verbs! Who we are/who God says we are is already accomplished by Jesus' death/rez & our baptism into that death/new life. Our belonging to/oneness in the body of Christ is a gift in our hands...a GIFT from God to us not a chore we still need to accomplish. Look @ person sitting next to you & say, "You are God's gift to me." Now look back & say "I know!" **Every** part of you is connected to the other disciples around you because you are "Christ's body." And the awesome part of that...no one is insignificant... **In his grace**, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. My gifts aren't necessarily the same as your gifts...But **ALL** gifts come from God all for the use of **HIS** church...

This family of faith/fellowship & the different gifts among us all are from God & he gives it all to us to use as a base of operations for living out his kingdom & character here in this world...a launch pad for taking his love to the world – for serving those who live distant from a relationship w/ God on a daily basis – not for creating some place that scratches my particular stylistic itch. Every part of you is connected to the other disciples around you because you are "Christ's body." The Gospel is a powerful, proactive dynamic word...a sure certain word that changes lives, builds community & transforms all of us creating a bond of love that lasts forever & establishes a fellowship stronger than any on earth...the gospel builds cathedrals.

Why is the church body embedded with all these gifts? How do those help us live the kingdom & character of God ^{b/4} the world? To the Ephesians Paul would explain: "...**he** has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ...to equip God's people to do his work & **build up the church**." God wants YOU to use YOUR gifts to build & strengthen HIS church. God intends the community of faith/body of Christ to grow larger & stronger as each of us puts our gifts & skills & energies to work in the world in the name of Jesus on behalf of those who are in need, especially those who need to hear perhaps for the first time the saving good news of Jesus' death & rez...the forgiveness of sin & the defeat of death & the forces of evil...3rd thing in building a cathedral --- **Every** part of the community is to be engaged in mission naming & overcoming evil with all that is good beautiful & true.

Doesn't matter how old you are, how busy you are, what you think you can/can't do. Jesus gifts you w/ some capacity to touch w/ your hands & share your voice & invest your love across the emptiness of someone else's life. Even the demons "know" Jesus is God's Son...but OUR lives are to reflect his presence w/in us – his power at work in us – his love growing & pouring through us. If there was a church Paul really felt was hitting faith in Christ for 6...really living the kingdom & character of God in every possible way...well on the way to cathedral...it'd be the Philippians. He is overwhelmingly thankful for the Xns @ Philippi. Why so much joy over them? "...it is

*right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the grace of God, both in my imprisonment & in **defending & confirming the truth of the gospel**." Paul says when I think of the church at its best at its most cathedral-like... Every facet of life of every disciple is offered to God. Every disciple is connected to the other disciples around them as "Christ's body." Every part of the community is engaged in mission naming & overcoming evil w/ all that is good beautiful & true...everybody is up to their earlobes "defending & confirming the truth of the gospel."*

Now that's not some shouting match/debate where the Xns argue down & out yell not-yet-believers or a protest march about some social upheaval or political triumph getting Xn candidates elected. Paul points to the ongoing work of God through the lives of his people (claimed into that decisive unique all-encompassing work of Jesus) to live that new reality into existence right here right now. D & C truth of the gospel means that the folks in Philippi/Wagga Wagga are living the gospel in the teeth of whatever circumstances/struggles/situations they find themselves...He says, "I can see it in you."

In being claimed by Jesus Christ...dying/rising w/ him by baptism into his life death resurrection & rule we are forged into a **gospel** community...where we become those who **worship** God, serve his kingdom's mission in the world & encourage one another, build one another up in faith, pray with & for one another, learn from & teach one another, and set for one another examples to follow, challenges to take up, & urgent tasks to perform." A cathedral in the making...

TAKE IT HOME –

Let's go back to this...

If Living Water Fellowship ceased to exist, do you think the people of Wagga Wagga would notice? Would they care? What would be different or lost?

What is one thing you can do this week to ensure that the mission entrusted to us by God makes a notable difference in this city?

Let's pray...

Heavenly Father,

By the work of your Spirit build your cathedral here. Let your love in us overflow more & more. Grow in us faith & wisdom & boldness so the world will see you in us "defending & confirming the truth of the gospel" for your glory & the widening reach of your kingdom. In Jesus' name. Amen.