

Romans 13:8-14

September 10, 2017

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Rob felt hurt having just come from his annual review in which his supervisor had not been very supportive. In fact, he indicated to Rob that he was lacking in many areas of competency and according to Rob, had used some rather negative language toward him regarding his future with the company. Rob was angry and once he got out of the meeting he immediately went to two or three of his colleagues and told them what had happened. One-by-one the rumors started to spread around the company and eventually Rob was called into the human resource department where his supervisor was present. Needless to say, the outcome was not good and Rob was eventually dismissed from the company.

We have all been in a similar situation. Maybe it's not an annual review. But it's something. We, too, have been hurt. Perhaps, it's because someone stands on the other side of a belief we cling to and deem it is the only correct answer. Rather than listen to their side of view and realize at times differences of opinion are good we instead put up a wall. Or we distance ourselves completely from them. Or we spread a rumor, put up a post on the internet, or tweet a response that gives our side and fails to acknowledge the side of the other –

maybe even distorting their side and turning others against them. The truth of the matter, in Rob's story, those who listened to Rob vent never knew the version as told by the supervisor. They only knew one version and it is entirely possible something else happened behind those closed doors. So often relationships get damaged, broken, and often never again reconciled because we have a choice to make and we make the wrong one. Or another person makes the wrong choice and we are on the receiving end feeling the pain. A relationship severed.

And that is what is at stake in our gospel passage and our passage from the book of Romans. Relationships. Because life is about relationships. Being church is about relationships. Our relationship to our Lord and Savior and our relationship to one another. Truly, that is what today is about. "God's work. Our hands." Sunday. It's about our connection to one another, to our neighbor and to our community. It's about love. Responding to God's love. God's amazing grace. God's perpetual grace. Because, truthfully we are all Gentiles and tax collectors standing outside of God's grace. In need of redemption, healing, forgiveness and being found by the Great Shepherd. And that is exactly what God in Christ has done. It's whole point of the first portion of Paul's letter to the church in Rome. This has been done. We have been redeemed, rescued, restored, forgiven, and encompassed in the perpetual grace of God. This is to guide, shape, and

permeate every single ounce of our being. Every single nook and cranny of the church. Every stroke of the law given by God and chiseled into stone by Moses are ultimately about relationships. Not about becoming righteous through them. Not about pointing out the speck in our neighbor's eye and failing to see the one in ours. No, the law is a gift to promote relationship. With God and with our neighbor and the law can be summed up in one word. LOVE. Perpetual grace that has been bestowed upon us by God.

At times love is lived out by confronting the one who hurt us directly because that is what love looks like - a love that seeks to reconcile, heal, listen and keep open the lines of communication. Doing something opposite – putting up a wall between a brother or sister, telling one or two or three others, spreading a rumor, posting something negative, failing to listen to the other and realize that just maybe we were in the wrong or misunderstood – ultimately runs contrary to the commandment to love.

Yes, I do think Jesus does say there are times a relationship simply can't be restored. A loving and life-giving relationship is not one in which one partner is dominated, abused, and enslaved to another. Because note Paul's words, which are exactly the same words Jesus will soon say in Chapter 22 of Matthew's gospel, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Loving our self, at times, calls us to seek help

and even make the difficult decision to distance ourselves from a particular situation. Yet, other times love calls us to enter a situation. When we see someone in an abusive relationship. When we see a fellow brother or sister being treated unjustly for the color of their skin, the partner they choose to love, the gender they are or identify with, the religion they believe in; love does not sit idle on the sidelines. Love responds and comes alongside and stands with. Love calls out for justice and may move us to write a letter, send an email, or place a phone call to an elected official. Love calls us to pray and it calls us to give as you all graciously did last week. We aren't a large congregation. Probably not even a medium-sized congregation. We are but a relatively small congregation but last week we stepped up to love our neighbor in need. We responded to God's perpetual grace by giving out of the abundance God has entrusted us with. When I learned of the number I was moved by your generosity. Your love. \$2,400 we gave last week to help our neighbors affected by Hurricane Harvey and as we sit in the safe and calm confines of this space we know many of our neighbors have fled for safety or find themselves directly in the midst of the howling winds, driving rains, and life-threatening conditions of Hurricane Irma. Once again, we may be called to respond out of our abundance and out of God's love that flows through us.

Love begins, starts and ends with God and it is God's love that is the light which enlightens those darkest recesses of our hearts, minds, and souls. In order to love, we must trust that perpetual love God has for us. We must believe it even when our minds may tell us it isn't true. Even when the world tells us it isn't true. We are loved. We are good enough just as we are – as God created us. We are at times, our own worst enemies. Harboring guilt, greed, hatred, or feelings we aren't good enough. But we are. You are. I am. God loves us. Loves you. Loves me. Perpetual grace. When we believe that and let go of all those things that bind us we are free to love. Ourselves. Our neighbor. Our Savior.

Right now the world needs love. Luther said we are to be "little Christs" to one another and we are called to see Christ in the other. I suspect this thought, inspired by the Holy Spirit, came from his study and theology shaped by the book of Romans. Transformed by the perpetual grace of God revealed through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The church, more than ever, is called and is needed to reflect the light of Christ. The love of God. The perpetual grace we are soaked in and clothed with. Amen.