

## **A Holy Family**

Trinity CRC, May 9, 2021 AM

Romans Series

**Romans 12:3-13**

Rev. Richard deLange

Reading intro:

Ironically, on the very Sunday our study in the book of Romans brings us to talk about the importance of being a church family, we are not permitted to be together at all. We've been sent back to online-only worship. And I'm not complaining about that. I'm very thankful that we have people who are doing their utmost to help us through this pandemic. They are not perfect. They might not get it right all the time. But they are working for our good. I respect them for that. And we must pray for them. But that's getting into Romans 13.

Please turn with me to our Bible reading in Romans 12. Last week we talked about the first two verses, actually just v.1 where Paul transitions us from all the **good teaching** about sin and grace to now thinking about **good living**. We pick up on that theme in verses 3-13.

First of all, pray with me please.

**Hear the word of the Lord.** Romans 12:3-13

<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. <sup>4</sup> For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. <sup>6</sup> We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; <sup>7</sup> if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; <sup>8</sup> if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

<sup>9</sup> Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. <sup>11</sup> Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Dear Body of Christ,

We are a holy family. You know what that means?

Well, today is Mother's Day and people in lots of places around the world are celebrating their moms. That's what human families do, whether the family is biological, adopted or maybe even a less formal relationship where a mom figure is honoured. These are good and beautiful relationships. They are holy in the sense that our holy God ordained them but this is not what I mean by a holy family.

The word holy means called out or separate. The Apostle Peter, for example, tells the church, "You are holy people, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." It's not that we are somehow more holy because of our actions. No, God brings us into his family, sets us apart from the world in that sense, and therefore calls us holy. The church is God's people who are set apart by God in this world so that people can get a glimpse of God through us.

### **Better Together**

According to Romans 12, that glimpse is best when we are together. The church is one body, says Paul.

*v.5 in Christ we, though many, form one body*

Paul uses the human body as a metaphor. And all of us can relate to that. If, for example, you've hit your finger hard with a hammer, you pretty much can't function for a while. All you can think about is the pain in that little part of your body. It is all-consuming until it starts to heal a little or we get some pain medication. When the body is functioning well, it's an amazing machine. We can get lots done and enjoy life more fully. But one small part not functioning as it should and everything slows down for a time or even grinds to a halt.

So I want to think about the two sides of being better together. The first is what we miss out on when we're not part of the living body of Christ. When we disconnect from this holy family, we lose out on certain things.

### **Our Loses Outside of the Family**

It's Mother's Day. Mom's love their families. Naturally, then, when a child is missing, parents grieve. An elderly man I know had 11 kids. When people asked him how many children he had, he would respond, "I have 5 and a half dozen." 5 plus 6. But he always added, "That is none too many. I wouldn't want to miss any of them."

Some Christians fail to realize that we are part of a bigger body. Some of us, according to Paul's analogy, are happy to be a finger all by ourselves. Or maybe a foot. Some might even think they are a brain! But none of those single parts of the body is very useful by itself. None can really reach its full potential alone.

When I was in my early 20s, I had a work accident that cut off the tip of my middle finger. This is one time when I can raise my middle finger in church but I'll point it sideways. 😊 You can hardly notice that the soft part of the top pad is gone now. But **if** I hit it wrong when I pick something up with that hand, I most certainly notice that little piece of flesh missing. I'll get what feels like a jolt of electricity up my arm when I hit that finger tip just under the nail. That simply means that even the little tip of skin and meat on the end of my finger is important. My finger was designed and created by God to function best with all the parts. And that's a thousand times more so with the whole body.

Paul's point is that this is the case with the church too. You are not complete and able to function as wonderfully as God desires if you are separate from the body.

I understand that you might not always appreciate other Christians. How many times haven't you heard people say something like, "I'd be part of a church but the church is just a bunch of hypocrites." To that, I respond, "Well, of course it is! We're all hypocrites. None of us lives the Christian life perfectly." The only one who lived a perfect life is our Lord Jesus. That's why he's the Saviour! None of us lives as he did, nor lives for the Lord Jesus as we should. None of us fully appreciates, either, how much we need other Christians to be all that God has in mind for us.

But in his plan to keep us all humble, the Lord has designed the church in such a way that we are not able to be our best as a Christian when we're alone. We miss out on certain things when we disconnect from the body. You might feel as small as the tip of my finger. Nonetheless, you're important and you belong. Whether you realize it or not, you do have a role to play and you won't know the joy of it until you get connected and stay connected.

Every single part of our body is important. We ourselves and every other Christian, even the people we aren't too fond of. I love how Paul says,

*v.5 each member belongs to all the others*

He uses that same sort of language when he talks about a wife and husband belonging to each other. Once the knot is tied, you're one. You might not always like your spouse. You might not agree on everything. There are times when you might really wonder whether the other one is even saved!

Then maybe later you realize that you've been overreacting or prideful. You realize that your spouse is not perfect but still good for you. Even very good. That's Paul's point with the church too. Some of those people you think are hypocrites belong to you and you to them. You're better together than apart. That's all the more reason to hold on to another, rather to push others away because we think they are hypocrites or something other than we think they should be. The fact is that we are all less than we should be in Christ when we disconnect from the body. Every member is important.

During the past year of this pandemic, some of us may have forgotten—to some degree at least—that the body is important. Covid has made functioning as a body more challenging to be sure. There are all kinds of prognosticators forecasting that the church will be in bad shape after the pandemic. Some are saying that as many as 30% of people won't return to their church when this is over. Why? Because they've become comfortable staying home on Sunday mornings. They like not having to rush off to worship. They enjoy simply wandering over to the TV with a cup of coffee or breakfast to watch church. They like the lack of accountability. In fact, if you don't happen to like who's singing or preaching at your usual church, you can find another one with a couple clicks of the mouse on your computer or a couple of channels away on your TV. That might seem nice right now, but in the long run, you'll discover that you're not as healthy as a Christian as you should be. You lose more than you gain by being disconnected from the body.

Here's why. Please think deeply about this. Despite the weaknesses of the church of Jesus Christ here on earth, we need it because the body is connected to the Head! There's a saying that goes, "There is no salvation outside of the church!" Think about that. Take it seriously. There is no salvation outside of the church. The point of that quote is that you cannot be connected to Jesus, the Head of the Church, if you're not part of his body.

We could make two **qualifiers** about that. Very briefly, Paul is not referring to people who want to be an active part of the church but can't because of health or some other real issue. And, two, we are saved by faith alone so I'm not prepared to say that someone who believes in Jesus as their Saviour but doesn't come to church is not a Christian. It is possible that someone doesn't belong to a small "c" church here on earth but does belong to the capital "C" Church. It's possible. But it certainly isn't the norm that we find in the Bible.

Our Lord Jesus is telling us through the Apostle Paul here in Romans 12 and again in 1 Corinthians 12 and through the Apostle Peter in his letters that church membership is important. Connection is important. Every part counts and every person is needed, no matter the role you play. Every single Christian ought to be connected to the church which forms the body and of which Christ is the Head.

Willingly choosing to separate ourselves from the body damages our spiritual health. You'll be impoverishing yourself. Just recently someone who hasn't been overly connected to the church said that he now realizes how wonderful it is to be part of the body. Even during this pandemic, the body of Christ here at Trinity has managed to find ways to connect and help and love. That's so encouraging to hear.

It's a reminder to us all of our losses when we try to do life as a Christian apart of God's holy family. Clearly, by disconnecting from the body, we stand to lose out on things that the Lord has in mind for us to enjoy as part of his body.

## Our Gain Inside of the Family

On the flipside then, we should talk about the things we gain from being connected to the holy family in a concrete way here on earth.

When Patsy and I were in Thailand three years ago now, taking care of our seriously ill daughter, we were an ocean away from you all here but your love and support nourished us daily. I've said this before but on our wedding anniversary, our kids arranged for us to have a day away from the stress of the hospital. We got driven by taxi about an hour out of Bangkok. There we were given bicycles and led through some amazing countryside locations. It was such a refreshing day. As I was biking I was thinking back to our home church here at Trinity. My heart began to ache and tears filled my eyes as I thought of returning to be with you, to reconnect with the body of Christ at Trinity. What I always knew to be true and important in my head suddenly took on a much more real and warm place in my heart. I knew we belonged to the body and even when miles separated us, we were still connected. God's holy family here nurtured us because we were connected.

This blessing of being an active member of a body of believers here on earth is expressed by Paul in vv.6-8 where he says

*<sup>6</sup> We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.*

Then he goes on the talk about how each person ought to use their God-given, Spirit-empowered gift for others. Listen again:

*If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; <sup>7</sup> if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; <sup>8</sup> if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.*

Paul is talking about using your gifts to enrich the body. You can't do that if you're not connected. Sure, those gifts can be used outside of the church too but he's talking here about using them within the body or as part of the holy family. All of these gifts contribute to God's plan to strengthen the church.

Friends, we find greatest joy in our faith when we serve others using our God-given gifts. We find our greatest fulfillment in doing the things we've been gifted by the Holy Spirit to do. We need to use those gifts humbly but willingly and joyfully. The more we do, the more our faith will grow. These are all expressions of love that Paul speaks about in the last part of the chapter.

Using our gifts blesses others but, in turn, blesses us. It enriches others but also enriches us. For example, there are less than 15 people in the building the morning. Mike is running the sound system today. That's one small thing he does and enjoys. But he's most passionate about Cadets. He's been doing it for what? Over 30 years, Mike? Why, because he loves it. That's not to say it doesn't have challenges and frustrations. But his love for that ministry combined with his gifts make him a stronger Christian by serving there. He has blessed others for all those years and he's been blessed greatly himself. I could say the same thing about

Case here who has taught catechism for 20 years. The same for our musicians, some of whom have played a role in the church's music ministry for decades. They keep doing it because it brings them joy. In being an active part of the body of Christ, they receive more than they give. They don't do it to receive. They do it to give and to bless others. But in return, blessings flow to them too. That's how Jesus designed it to work in his holy family.

The thing that makes the body so wonderful is that every little and bigger part plays a role in making the whole body more majestic. It's true in our physical body and it's true in the body of Christ, the Church. I think back a year ago when one of our members was in the hospital and needed a phone charger. We didn't know how to get one to him because of all the covid restrictions. But I put out an email to ask. Within an hour I had 7 or 8 responses—all from young adults in the church family. And before noon that day, this man had a charger and we could connect with him. That's just a small incident but incredible! I'm so glad to hear the church moving to love one another, even if it's just in one small simple thing. It all counts.

The mystery is that we see God doing much more than we could imagine with our limited gifts. In fact, one Canadian pastor put it like this in a recent article in the Faith Today magazine:

...God continue(s) to transform people in our church (even during the pandemic), not in spite of our limitations, but because of them. Embracing our collective weakness made space for people to be vulnerable about their own limitations. We didn't need to worry about being good because the gospel assured us we already belonged. All we had to do was show up.

In many ways our church felt like a potluck.... At a potluck each of us brings what we can, even if we can't bring much. Some help with setup and dishes. Others keep the food warm and make Gluten-Free labels. The tasting notes clash, and a child might steal food right off your plate. It's messy, and none of it is done particularly well.

But in an act of divine alchemy the Spirit receives our hodgepodge, piecemeal offering and turns it into a feast of victory.

This act of grace is what I long for everyone to experience – to belong to a local family of people, shaping their ordinary lives around Christ and His table, transformed together from something imperfect and incomplete into something uniquely whole and holy.

<https://www.faithtoday.ca/Magazines/2021-Mar-Apr/Does-church-still-matter.-even-in-a-pandemic>

My friends, God takes the little we bring into the church and makes us stronger and the church stronger. And that, in turn, deepens our faith and our love, which strengthens our witness and impact on the world. All of it for the glory and honour of the Head of the holy family, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

# SUNDAY WORSHIP

May 9, 2021, 10 AM

**Livestream & Emm Home only**

## **GOD CALLS US TO WORSHIP**

Welcome

Pastor Rich

Opening Prayer

Call to Worship

God's Greeting

Gathering Songs: *Only A Holy God*

*Goodness of God*

## **WE RENEW COVENANT WITH OUR GOD**

Prayer of Confession

Nicole Potvin

Assurance of Salvation

God's Will for Our Lives

Song: *My God, How Wonderful You Are*

LUYH 548:1,5,6

## **GOD GIVES US HIS WORD**

Children's Message

Julie Prins VanderVeen, World Renew

Kid's Song: *Butterfly Song*

Bentums

Prayer for the Word

Scripture Reading: Romans 12:3-13

Patsy deLange

Sermon: ***A Holy Family***

## **WE RESPOND TO GOD'S GRACE**

Song: *The Servant Song*

Congregational Prayer

Elder Kevin Hofstede

*Deanna & Musicians come up. Musicians & Pastor say "People" parts of litany*

World Renew Litany

Deacon Deanna Bulsink

Tithes & Offerings

1. Trinity Ministries (Budget)

2. World Renew Maternal & Child Health

## **GOD SENDS US IN HIS STRENGTH**

God's Parting Blessing

Sending Song: *Now Thank We All Our God*

LUYH 543