

***“Give Yourself Away”***

Meditation on Romans 15:4-13

Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

Dec. 4, 2016

*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. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. 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, 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’; and again he says, ‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people’; and again, ‘Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him’; and again Isaiah says, ‘The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope.’ 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.*

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I am happy to see the children and families from the childcare center today in worship! We are so blessed that the 3 and 4 year olds came to sing and share your joyful spirit and energy with all of us! We love you! We pray for you! We want to be a blessing to you! If you are not a member of a local congregation and you are seeking a place to worship and have friendships with other Christians, we invite you to join with us. You are already one of the MIPC family!

We were so pleased when some of you came to our Rally Day activities in September. Then, more of you came to our Fall Festival in October,

dressed in costume and ready for more games, food, fellowship and crafts! Then, we invited you and some of you came to our Thanksgiving Dinner a couple of weeks ago! It was so nice to share in that very special meal with you! If you have 4-year-old children or grandchildren in VPK, we are blessed when they come to our church for chapel twice a month. We are so glad when you join us for Tuesday night suppers! I am looking forward to getting to know you better in the months to come. Our suppers will start up again January 17 with macaroni and cheese and fried chicken, thanks to the dedicated, hardworking volunteers on our Fellowship committee!

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The Apostle Paul, in writing to the church in Rome, is concerned that some Jewish Christians don't want to eat with or associate with Gentile Christians who don't observe the Old Testament food laws. He says in Romans 14:14, "Nothing is unclean in itself" and that the important thing is to not let your convictions about diet stir you to judge others and disturb the peace of the community. Paul says in Romans 15:5, "May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul quotes Old Testament Scripture to show that it still shapes and unites the community of faith--Jew and Gentile--that seeks to worship and obey the same God. In the new covenant, the food laws and circumcision are not necessary. For love of the world, God graciously sent His Son, our Emmanuel, to give up his life so we may be forgiven from our sins and have everlasting life with Him. Paul emphasizes that Scripture is the source of our

hope and comfort, to help us endure suffering and remain faithful to our faithful God. He quotes from Deuteronomy 32:43, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people” and Psalm 117:1, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him.” He quotes the prophet Isaiah with the verse about the Root of Jesse who will rule over the nations and be the hope of the Gentiles.

Paul encourages Christians to eat together as a sign of their unity in Christ and their love for one another. He says in 15:7, “Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God!” The word “welcome” may also be translated, “accept” and “receive.” This kind of welcome isn’t just, “Hello, how are you?” and shaking hands with a stranger or neighbor. This kind of welcome is the one where you open your heart and your home and you put the needs and desires of the other person before your own. This kind of welcome means you give yourself away, *as Christ gave himself for us.*

Paul using Jesus as the perfect model of hospitality--giving and receiving it--fits the Jesus we know from the gospels. Jesus liked to eat and drink at other people’s houses. His ministry was intimate and personal and often involved food. He didn’t wait for an invitation to supper at the home of Zacchaeus the tax collector to reward and encourage him for his faith. He ate with his friends, Mary and Martha, who didn’t always agree on who should do the work. He ate with people who didn’t like or trust him and would oppose him--Pharisees and Scribes. He asked for water from a Samaritan woman not respected in her community and offered her living water so she would never thirst again. He ate with rich and poor, powerful and powerless as he drew others nearer to God through belief on Him and preached life in the Kingdom.

He taught his disciples to follow his example for personal and intimate ministry. He sent them out to stay in people's homes and accept their hospitality. Those who opened their homes and fed them would be blessed. He told the 12 in Matthew 10:40-42: <sup>40</sup>“Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. <sup>41</sup>Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. <sup>42</sup>And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.”

Jesus, sending off the 70 in Luke 10:5-9, says <sup>5</sup>“When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ <sup>6</sup>If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup>Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. <sup>8</sup>“When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. <sup>9</sup>Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’”

Jesus welcomes people by feeding them--body, mind, heart and soul. When his disciples are going to send away a crowd who have listened to Jesus teach all day, he feeds the multitude with a few loaves and a couple fish, given by a child and multiplied by God. At the Last Supper, Jesus blesses the bread and breaks it, giving it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat. This is my body, given for you.” He encourages them to continue to gather to eat and feed one another when he says, “Do this in remembrance of me.” In Luke 24, two disciples walk along a road with the risen Christ, not knowing who he is. They invite him to their home and don't recognize him

till they sit down to eat a meal and he “breaks the bread.”

Jesus doesn't shy away from cooking, either. The risen Christ is on the seashore cooking bread and fish over a charcoal fire in John 21, while his disciples are out fishing one day. They don't know who he is until a miraculous catch opens their eyes to his identity. He says to them, ‘Bring some of the fish that you have just caught’ and ‘Come and have breakfast.’ After the disciples’ bodies are nourished, he feeds their hearts and souls, too, offering Peter, who denied him 3 times, another chance to get it right--to give of himself, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Then he charges him to minister as He did--nourishing heart and mind, body and soul of others.

Jesus says to Peter, using his formal given name and not the nickname that he had given him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?’ Peter says, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ Jesus says to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’<sup>16</sup> A second time Jesus says to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter says, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ Jesus says, ‘Tend my sheep.’<sup>17</sup> Jesus says a third time, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter feels hurt because he has asked him three times if he loved him. And Peter says, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus says, ‘Feed my sheep.’

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The bake sale after worship today will feed your body and bless the souls at the childcare center, which is in need of trikes and a stroller that would hold 4 or more babies. Thank you to all who made cookies and other sweets to sell at the sale! But before you shop for goodies, please take some time to enjoy fellowship and refreshments in our Narthex, the lobby of the church. It

will be a perfect time to “welcome one another, as Christ has welcomed you.” But remember, “welcome” means much more than just saying, “Hi, how are you?” It means opening your heart and home. It means putting the needs and desires of your neighbors before your own. It means *give yourself away* as Christ gave himself for us.

Let us pray.

God of Hope, we give you thanks for the welcome you have given us, receiving us through the sacrifice of your Son, Jesus Christ, and every day, holding out your arms to us and beckoning us to come. Thank you for your love and grace, covering all our sins, and for providing for our needs each day--body, mind, heart and soul. Help us, Lord, to minister as Jesus did--to seek to be welcoming to one another and to the stranger in need. Teach us to open our hearts and love without fear--to give ourselves away, as your Son gave Himself for us. In His name we pray. Amen.