

Pastor T.C. Arnold
4th Sunday after Trinity
Romans 12:14-21
June 27th, 2010

It seems as though we need not search too far and wide to discover... what is hard. Rather than going out to find trouble, much of the time trouble has a way of finding us. It's hard to speak up when someone is not following the rules, or is taking advantage of someone else, or needs to be set straight. It's hard to motivate oneself to get done what needs to get done for the day. It's hard when a loved one gets sick, is dying or has already passed on. We don't go out and find these situations in life – they find us. There is enough that is difficult about life that we could fill volumes with our struggles, our fears, the situations we wish we never have to face... but we have to face them anyway. That seems to be life in a nutshell.

And life in this regard is hard enough without your Lord telling you that there is more to add to your challenges. He says so in the text appointed for this day, Romans chapter twelve. Besides all the situations in life that go haywire and become difficult to deal with, God expects you to, *“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”* That's hard. Along with rejoicing with those who rejoice, the Lord also says, *“mourn with those who mourn.”* Human nature tends to want to take us away from those who mourn... what do we say? What will we do? That person is just going to ruin my mood. *“Associate with people of low position,”* says the Lord. *“Do not repay anyone evil for evil.”* But I want to get even so badly. *“Be careful to do what is right...”* *“Do not take revenge...”* You know, this game of life is hard enough without the Lord giving us these rules to live by. How am I suppose to take care of all the challenges that come my way and still remain cool, calm and collected enough to bless those who persecute me, not take revenge, do what is right all the time, and so on? Well, I have an answer for you... I have absolutely no idea. I struggle just like you do.

That wasn't a good answer – and actually I do have a good idea... a Godly idea. It's not my idea. Rather, St. Paul gives us more to help us along just a few verses before the Epistle reading begins today. It starts just five verses earlier in verse nine. It starts with a simple word that all of you know quite well. And I bet you know it in the original language. The word that helps us with all of God's rules and challenges for life is *ἀγάπη* (love). It says in verse nine, *“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”*

And yes, with these words more is added on us. More is expected of us. But the key word in all that the Lord has given is, “Love.” The reason, love is not an emotion we are asked to dig out from deep within ourselves to share with others – even those who don't seem to deserve it. Rather, the love that our Lord gives is simply an expression of what comes from and belongs to Christ in the first place. In other words, we don't need to create it, or conjure it up. Simply put, we reflect it. Christ's love is seen through His servants – we reflect Christ and His love in our service. Christians are “little Christ's” in the flesh who show what Christ has freely given to His creation. Love comes from God and is fully comprehended in what has been gifted to us in the first place. Our love toward others comes first from God.

How do you love? Do you love your neighbor? Do you love your family? I would imagine that most of us would be apt to say, “of course.” We “do good” to our neighbor and we do good to our family. But in love it's more than doing good, it's “doing right.” The reason,

doing good is relative and left open to interpretation. Doing right could be too, but not when doing right is Biblical.

For example, I could “do good” according to my oldest son by purchasing him a brand new “I Touch”. That may be “doing good” – but perhaps – given a number of different factors that parents have to consider (price, need, what other things it might take him away from) it might not be right. We struggle with the different between good and right all the time. It might seem good for our kids to not have to go to Sunday school or Weekday School. “I can rest and relax” they might say. I can get other things done or even, mom, wash your car instead.” And we parents might even fall into the trap of thinking they are right. It might be good (according to many different interpretations) but it might not be right (according to what is God-pleasing). Be discerning, beloved in the Lord.

Today, we have two baptisms – one at the 8 A.M. Service and the other at the 10:45 A.M. Service. What a blessing. But with doing what is good and right – the baptism – comes much responsibility for the future – it’s “right” responsibility and it’s good responsibility. So many times we see families baptizing their children, making the promise to raise them in the Christian faith, and yet never bringing them to the Lord’s House or following through with instructing them about what their baptism even means. How can we make this expression of love by God through water and the Word, our expression of love to our Child?

Parents, I promise you, your good and right expression of love coming by way of teaching your child or children about what Jesus has done for them is a far greater expression of love than buying them a brand new video gaming system, a brand new cell phone, or whatever. These things satisfy our children – and us – for time – but they do not last forever. The expression of love that fills the hearts and lives of our children comes through the cross of Jesus, gifted in water and the Word, in Holy Communion. This is what lasts eternally.

When we are taught the Love of Christ – the love that is more than just affection – but rather a love of full comprehension and purpose – we are given the tools to take head on the challenges of blessing those who persecute us, mourning with those who mourn, not repaying evil for evil, etc... That’s hard to do. But with the love of Christ, we can. Christ’s love came first and because He has done the same with you and me – we can too.

Doing what is right means being in control. It means heeding the commands in Romans chapter twelve. Doing right might not always seem like doing what is good. Sometimes, we think, doing what is good means getting even, withholding blessings from those who persecute us, or taking revenge when the opportunity arises. Our interpretation of good is not always God’s interpretation of good. Beloved in the Lord, make sure what you are doing is God pleasing. Put your daily works up next to the Word of God and see if your ways are following the will of our Lord. It’s not easy. It’s down right hard. Especially with all the other difficult stuff we deal with each and every day.

Take from today a new beginning to follow and heed the words of God. Take what you saw here today – a new life gifted to children to who have just begun life on earth. And for the very reason we do these baptisms right in front of the whole congregation – you participate as well. These baptisms serve as a reminder of what Christ has given to you. We have the blessed opportunity to remember our baptisms when our precious children are washed cleaned with the water and the Word. With that same gift given to us, we have been strengthened to serve – to bless – to rejoice – to mourn – to not repay evil – to not take revenge – to not be conceited – and with all that – to LOVE from the one who first loved us – to death. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.